

YOU CAN HAVE IT BOTH WAYS:
CONTEMPORARY WORSHIP VS. TRADITIONAL WORSHIP STYLES

By

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ABSTRACT

There is a debate going on in the black church that pits traditional worship against contemporary worship styles. Those who argue in favor of traditional worship maintain that some liturgical “basics” are non-negotiable. Worship must include hymns and other liturgical elements and must hold fast to the already established and uniformly accepted order of service. Conversely, those who argue in favor of contemporary worship maintain that the church must be able to serve individuals on every level of their needs. These needs include making room for substituting the traditional hymns for “praise and worship” songs and restructuring the worship experience so that it displays a more contemporary style. This project will attempt to show that you can have it both ways

My plan of implementation involved exploring the practices of worship in the African American Church with particular attention to Pentecostal and Baptist traditions. Opportunities were created for worship in my setting and other settings that maintained the “spiritual praxis” of the African American church tradition while incorporating insight/practices for renewed church forms.

I accomplished this by creating workshops, seminars, and forming focus groups within my church setting and other congregational settings that demonstrated that the traditional and contemporary styles of worship can have a dual function in the church with effective results. Topics covered in the workshops, seminars and focus groups are “The Elements of Worship,” “How Do You Define Worship?” and “Contemporary vs. Traditional – Which Do You Prefer, and Why?”

Finally, I introduced my new congregation to a more contemporary style of worship without denying them the more traditional form that they had grown accustomed

to. I accomplished this by involving the congregation in the process of the changes that brought about a transformation of the entire worship experience. This was not an easy task. Most of the congregation consists of older women who have been in the church for many years without any significant changes in the worship service.

This Demonstration Project is a story that chronicles my journey as I attempted to lead a group of Caribbean worshippers to a new and much improved worship style. These are people who, over time, became adapted to a worship style that brought them to church on Sunday where they sang a few hymns, prayed, listened to the sermon and went home. This journey included the introduction of some current streams of worship that would present a new “Praise and Worship Team,” the learning of contemporary songs, and the presentation of contemporary renditions of some traditional hymns.

Most of my efforts were rewarded with success and some were not. Nevertheless, this project proved to be a step-by-step witness of the evolution that can take place when the church of God and its congregants explore their options and find that variety can be the “spice” of our worship lifestyle. In other words, you can have it both ways.

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DEDICATION

To Melanie Maureen

Marjorie Elaine

Mildred

Elsie

For all of your unwavering support throughout the years

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CHALLENGE STATEMENT

There is a debate going on in the black church that pits traditional worship against contemporary worship styles. Those who argue in favor of traditional worship maintain that some liturgical “basics” are non-negotiable. Worship **must** include traditional, familiar hymns and other liturgical elements, and must hold fast to the already established and uniformly accepted order of service.

Conversely, those who argue in favor of contemporary worship maintain that the church must be able to serve individuals on every level of their need. These needs include making room for substituting “praise and worship” songs for the traditional hymns and restructuring the worship experience so that it displays a more contemporary style. This Demonstration Project will attempt to show that “You Can Have It Both Ways”

TO THE READER

On Sunday, June 11th, 2005, I was installed as the Pastor of the Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly. The circumstances surrounding this appointment are detailed for you in the description of the setting. Suffice it to say that I welcomed the chance to make some changes in the worship experience at this church. The uncanny timeliness of my appointment and the due process of this Demonstration Project have only served to enrich the possibilities of change; my congregation and I have become more aware of what needs to change, what needs to be revised and what needs to be eliminated in the context of our worship service.

This thesis is a story. It is my story told through the lenses of a woman who sat in the pews of this church as a child, and has grown up and become the pastor of the same church that holds her childhood memories. It is a story about what happened at the Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly when I returned to this church not as a member, but as the leader who attempts to introduce a new form of worship style. It is the story of a people who have not been exposed to and therefore never accepted any other genre of worship except what has been in place for over 29 years. It is the story of me, Rev. Denise Graves, who at times felt like Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. They (my congregation) murmured and complained, yet I am still responsible for convincing them that they can honor their traditional worship styles and at the same time embrace the new contemporary forms as well.

In other words, this is a story of how the Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly can have it both ways.

PART 1

There cannot be a present without a past. You cannot have it both ways until you explore where the “way” came from. Everything has a history. So does this “thing” we call worship.

INTRODUCTION

I have often wondered why some churches have a line waiting to get in at the 8 and 11 o'clock service while some churches are barely filling the pews. I often wondered what exactly was behind the walls of these crowded churches that seemed to make people so eager to get in. I am well aware that the determining factors are many and varied, but I believe that one major reason for the long lines at some churches is that people are experiencing worship in ways that are satisfying their need for a connection to God. I have often asked people why they attend Church A. Most answered that the reason for attending was the fact that the worship style was modern and uplifting. The choir sang songs that were similar to those of contemporary gospel recording artists, and the sermons were relevant to their everyday lives. "In this church," they said, "the preacher isn't always begging for money and the service doesn't go on all day." These people made it clear to me that they went to this church because the building itself represented a contemporary style which included a parking lot, coffee shop, ATM machine, bookstore, library and cafeteria. They also didn't hesitate to let me know that the traditional organ music wasn't necessary. The organ had been replaced with a full band, which included keyboard, drums, base guitar etc.

It seems to me that all of the tradition that I associate with worship has made a rapid departure from the modern day church. I believe that tradition must be the framework for contemporary worship because one builds upon the other. I also wonder if people are looking for something different, or are they looking for something better, I

believe that there is much at stake for those that are a part of this movement. In my discussions with my Site Team members, they suggested that too many people are gravitating to what feels good, looks good, and sounds good instead of discerning whether or not God's Spirit is really present.

John 4:23 states, "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such to worship Him." (KJV). Whether contemporary or traditional, our elements of worship must emerge from the inside out, not from the outside in. This means that whether we are singing, praying, testifying, or simply standing with our hands raised in adoration to God, there must be an abiding connection to the Father and a real relationship to Him that exists and is so alive within us that our expressions of worship literally burst through to the outside and let everybody know that what is being expressed is real.

"You Can Have It Both Ways" will attempt to demonstrate by way of research, trials and/or errors, seminars, experiments, workshops and interviews that both the traditional style of worship and the contemporary style of worship can successfully blend together to produce a more spirit-filled worship experience.

Three research questions will be answered:

1. What is the Biblical understanding of worship and in what ways is it portrayed in the Bible"
2. "What is the historical analysis of worship as it relates to justice and liberation?"
3. "What are some of the current streams of contemporary worship, are they successful, and if they are, why is that so?"

My plan of implementation will include creating opportunities for worship in my setting and other settings that maintain the “spiritual praxis” of the African American church tradition while incorporating insight/practices for renewed church forms. Secondly, by involving my congregation in the process, I will introduce them to a more contemporary style of worship without denying them the more traditional form that they have become accustomed to.

It is my hope that my plan of implementation will bring about a transformation of the entire worship service. This will not be an easy task. Most of the congregation consists of older women who have been in the church for several years. I believe that some of them would appreciate something new even though they can’t define what “new” means to them in the context of worship. Nevertheless, there remains plenty of room for improvement. Improvement means that there should be a transformation in the worship, a transformation in the congregants, and a transformation in me.

At this point I cannot say for sure where my endeavors will take me. It will be interesting to see what happens, what doesn’t happen, and what could have happened as I attempt to prove that “You Can Have It Both Ways!”

“WHERE TO FIND IT”

My proposal has identified three Goals for this project, and the Strategies I planned to employ to achieve each Goal.

Goal - To explore the traditions and practices of worship in the African American church. This will include examining the *historical* place of worship in the African American tradition

Strategy – To research these traditions in the African American church in its various denominational and cultural formations by reading relevant documents both current and historical, and to view relevant films that show the history of the Black Church. **See chapters 2-4**

Goal – To create opportunities for worship in my setting and other settings that maintain the “spiritual praxis” of the African American church tradition while incorporating insight/practices for renewed church forms.

Strategy – This will be done by creating workshops and forming focus groups within my church setting and other congregational settings that will demonstrate that the traditional and contemporary styles of worship can have a dual function in the church with effective results. **See Chapter 5 – “The Current Streams of Worship – Are They Successful”? See Chapter 7 – “Outside of My World”**

Goal – To introduce my new congregation to a more contemporary style of worship without denying them the more traditional form that they have grown accustomed to

Strategy – By involving the congregation in the process, I will introduce them to new worship styles that incorporate both traditional and contemporary forms that will bring about a transformation of the entire service. **See Chapter 6 – “Easier Said Than Done”**

CHAPTER 1: THE SETTING

I serve as the Senior Pastor of The Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly located at 652 Classon Avenue, Brooklyn, New York. The building is 80 years old but relatively well preserved. The church holds 210 people comfortably and is a single level edifice with one aisle down the middle.

The neighborhood consists mostly of African Americans and Hispanics of low and middle income families. There is, however, a huge revitalization in progress as many new co-ops and condominiums are being built. I have also observed many new businesses that have recently opened and the neighborhood as a whole is definitely on the upswing.

The congregation consists mostly of women (there are about 10 men) who are from the Caribbean Islands. Most are older people who have been in the church for “years”, but there is a group of younger people (20’s thru 40’s) who are eager to see the church transformed into a 21st century experience. The church appears to have experienced very little innovation in the past, and so I believe that the entire worship experience at the Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly is in need of a complete transformation.

The Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly is an interesting mixture of immigrants from various Caribbean Islands; hence there are many different personalities. One might ask how has Pentecostalism, a decidedly American form of Christian revivalism, managed to achieve such phenomenal religious ascendancy among people of African descent.

Pentecostalism has flourished because it successfully mediates between two historically central yet often opposing themes in Caribbean life: the African striving for personal freedom and happiness, and the Protestant struggle for atonement and salvation through rigorous ethical piety. With its emphasis on individual experience of grace and on the ritual efficacy of spiritual healing, and with its vibrant expressive worship, Caribbean Pentecostalism has become a powerful and compelling vehicle for the negotiation of such fundamental issues as gender, sexuality, race, and class.

Pentecostalism is one of the world's most rapidly expanding religious frameworks. It is a movement that promises that the current world order and its inequities will be eradicated with the second coming of Christ. As a form of fundamental Christianity, Pentecostalism demands strict moral rigor from its followers in return for the rewards of eternal life in Heaven. This doctrine is the ONLY doctrine that Caribbean people who are Pentecostals believe and follow.¹

The majority of the members of the Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly came to America (namely Brooklyn) from Barbados to make a better life for themselves. Someone from the family came first to pave the way for the rest of the family to follow. All of them came in search of economic opportunities beyond the margins of the Island. It is more than a movement of labor in search of jobs; for most it is a movement of the household. Their "Coming to America" affects not only the well-being of members of the household, but their social relationships as well. These members feel more at home with each other as they share the various aspects of their culture. There are a few Southern

¹ Diane J. Austin-Broos, "Jamaica Genesis: Religion and the Politics of Moral Orders," www.press.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/hfs.cgi/00/13272.ctl - 9k (accessed 16 January 2007).

American women in the church whom the Caribbean members are friendly with, but not “close.”

It is even interesting to see how they relate to and show their love for their Pastor. Every week one woman brings me a mango, the next week someone else brings me ginger candy. Every Wednesday after Bible Study, I have to announce “Pathmark is open” because one of the members works for a food distributor and she literally drags bags and bags of canned goods to the church for her “sisters.” I have yet to tell one member that I hate cow-foot soup!! She brings me a home-made sampling every week.

All of these kind gestures always remind me of my childhood growing up at the Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly. My maternal grandmother was one of the founders, my late Aunt was the Sunday School Superintendent, my Mother is the Missionary President and so the members consider me not only their Pastor, but family.

That means that there remains a bond that exists between all of us that was established from this church’s inception, a bond that can never be broken because many of the members are second, third, and fourth generation parishioners. Most of us are biologically connected to somebody else in the church so there seems to exist a vested interest in everything that happens at BPA. This church is not only the place where they “work out their soul’s salvation,” it is also the place where they share common struggles and hardships as immigrants who are trying to improve their socio-economic conditions. They laugh together, they cry together, they worship together. “Together” seems to work well for them. As long as they have each other, they’ll be alright.

The members of this Caribbean-Pentecostal group are not only connected to each other, but have a deep concern for the welfare of their church.

In the spirit of their togetherness, the entire membership has expressed a desire to hold on to tradition in their worship experience, but at the same time they all recognize the need to “rejuvenate” the worship services. For example, a typical Sunday morning worship service will begin with two previously selected people (usually women) who mount the pulpit and begin by leading the congregation in the same songs from the hymnal that are usually sung every Sunday. The hymnal has about 776 songs in it, but for the most part they will usually select the ones that they have been singing for years and thus have become very comfortable with. After a while the worship leaders will invite the congregation to the altar for prayer, and as everyone labors before the Lord, someone will lead everyone in prayer. Next comes the recognition of visitors, tithes and offerings, and then the preached Word.

From the time service begins to the time the preacher begins to preach is about one hour, and I am of the belief that by that time most parishioners have become anesthetized; they have not felt the power and transformation that can take place in a worship service.

I have engaged some of the congregants in conversation about the possibility of revamping the worship service. Some are ready for a complete change toward a more contemporary style, while others are “steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of holding on to tradition!”

On Sunday, October 23rd, 2005, I held my first Membership Meeting so that I could share my vision with my parishioners. I told them about my plans to rejuvenate the worship experience by introducing new songs and new liturgy. I expressed my enthusiasm about the cosmetic changes that I hoped to make a reality. For instance, we

have a huge vacant lot adjoining the church that would make an excellent parking lot that will be sorely needed in the very near future.

I have been the Pastor of the Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly for 18 months. I realize that there is an enormous amount of work that has to be done. As I look at the water-stained ceiling and the cracks in the walls, I often wonder not only how much time it will take but also how much money will have to be spent in order to begin the repairs. My concerns are not only for the church building, but for the church members. When I look at the cracks in the walls I am reminded of how fragmented the worship service is as well. I have been here long enough to know that this congregation is ripe for something new. However, being ripe does not necessarily mean that change will be embraced and practiced. This is the same church that I grew up in and one thing that has never changed is their “supernatural” ability to hold on to tradition. Anything outside of that is considered “sinful”!

On a positive note, the Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly is not a poor church. Over the years the congregation has managed to accrue a respectable amount of money in several bank accounts and the Board of Trustees seems ready to tap into these resources so that some changes can be made.

Three people have come to Christ in the last three months and I have formed a New Converts Class so that they can grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. I am in the process of hiring a Minister of Music and the congregation is slowly growing in numbers and growing in grace. The Board of Trustees has approved monies for a complete upgrade of our electrical system and that work has already begun. God has raised up a few new voices, hence a Praise and Worship Team is beginning to form.

Slowly but surely the church is taking on a new face. As the congregation sees these changes I can tell that their spirits are lifted and they are encouraged not only by what they see, but also by how they feel. There is a fresh wind and a fresh fire in the church and all of know that what God has done for us thus far is only the beginning.

I believe that the Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly is on the move

CHAPTER 2: THE HISTORY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WORSHIP

Black religious institutions have been the foundation of Afro-American culture. An agency of social control, a source of economic cooperation, an arena for political activity, a sponsor of education, and a refuge in a hostile world, the black Church has been historically the social center of Afro-American life.

In 1890, 90 percent of the African-American population was concentrated in the South. Between 1890 and 1930 more than 2.5 million black people left the South, and increasing numbers of those who remained moved from the country to the city. By 1930, 44 percent of the black population lived in the urban areas of the nation. What caused this massive movement? The main two factors that pushed rural black farmers off the land were a depressed rural economy and racial discrimination. In the 1890's, a series of natural disasters, including boll weevil infestations, ruined the cotton crop, the main staple of Southern farming, and produced economic misery for black sharecroppers and tenant farmers. In addition, the pervasive system of racial discrimination and the threat of violence against any black person who stood up to the system hindered the efforts of black Southerners to better their education. The factors that pulled them toward the cities included the expansion of industrial jobs in the North and the shortage of cheap labor due to the outbreak of World War I in 1914, which reduced the supply of unskilled laborers from Europe. ²

² Albert J. Raboteau, *Canaan Land: A Religious History of African Americans* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 82.

One of the most significant of the religious movements to attract blacks during the period of migration was in many ways a return to the emphasis on spiritual experience and emotional worship of the “old-time” religion. In the late nineteenth century, an interdenominational movement that stressed the ideal of holiness emerged out of the Methodist and several other churches. The proponents of this Holiness movement preached that there was a second spiritual experience after conversion, called sanctification, which made the Christian holy. In 1885, two black Baptist ministers, Charles H. Mason and Charles P. Jones, accepted the Holiness doctrine of sanctification and began to preach it to Baptist congregations in Mississippi. Expelled by the local Baptist association, they proceeded in 1897 to organize the Church of God in Christ in Memphis, Tennessee.

About the same time, some advocates of Holiness began to speak of still another experience beyond sanctification, called baptism with the Spirit, an experience of the presence of the Holy Spirit received as a gift from God. Under the power of the Spirit, these twentieth-century Christians expected to speak in unknown tongues just as the disciples of Jesus did on the feast of Pentecost (a religious festival held fifty days after Passover) as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. Hence the name for this new movement became Pentecostalism. Along with speaking in tongues, the other gifts of the Spirit included prophesy and healing.³

In 1906, William J. Seymour, a black Holiness preacher, started a prayer meeting in a private home in Los Angeles. As people began to speak in tongues, the crowd increased and a religious revival began that quickly outgrew the house. The revivalists quickly relocated to an old building on Azusa Street in downtown Los Angeles. For the

³ Ibid., 83.

next three years the Azusa Street Revival attracted white, black, Hispanic, and Asian Christians from all over the nation and the world who were eager to receive baptism with the Spirit and the gift of speaking of tongues. Among the thousands of pilgrims who flocked to Azusa Street was Charles H. Mason, who received the gift of Spirit baptism. When Mason returned to Memphis in 1907 and preached the doctrine of speaking in tongues, his colleague Charles Jones rejected the new message and a split in the church developed. The majority of members followed Mason into the Pentecostal movement, and they kept the name the Church of God in Christ. Under the leadership of Mason, the Church of God in Christ became the largest black Pentecostal denomination. Jones and his group took the name the Church of Christ (Holiness) U.S.A. The “sanctified” churches, as the Holiness and Pentecostal congregations were called, encouraged their members to express the gifts of the Spirit. They also required that their members abstain from tobacco, alcohol, drugs, gambling, dancing, makeup, and “worldly” entertainment, such as concerts, movies, and theater. Ridiculed by outsiders as “holy rollers” because of the emotional expressiveness of their services, they introduced the use of “secular” musical instruments such as guitars, pianos, and drums into their religious services, and made a major contribution to the development of black gospel music. Their style of religious music eventually influenced the tastes of churches that once banned such instruments as tools of the devil.

In effect, the congregations created little social worlds within the larger, often hostile white world. Members were trained to develop habits of honesty, thrift, hard work, and discipline. Eventually they tended to move up economically and educationally, within the limits set by racial discrimination.

At its beginnings the Pentecostal movement had inspired interracial cooperation. The leadership of the Azusa Street Revival included whites as well as blacks, and Mason ordained many white Pentecostal ministers. But by 1920, sanctified churches, like the larger society in the United States, had split along racial lines. A century after the Methodist and Baptist movements had tried and failed, the Holiness and Pentecostal movements were no more successful at sustaining interracial Christian community in the face of widespread racial prejudice, discrimination, and segregation.

A wide range of new religious options confronted African Americans in the urban world, including religious communities that gathered around new messiahs. In the 1930's and 1940's the best-known nationally was Father Divine (1879-1965), who was believed by his followers to have the power to heal illness, poverty, and racism. George Baker, Jr., as he was known before taking the name Father Divine, was born in Rockville Maryland. As a young man he moved to Baltimore, where he worked as a gardener and developed an interest in religious ideas, including the theory that negative thinking produced illness and problems whereas positive thinking tapped into the power of God and produced healing. Baker began to preach religious messages on street corners and in private homes, slowly gathering a following.⁴

In 1906 he visited the Azusa Street Revival and claimed to have received an experience of God's presence within himself. Continuing his traveling ministry, he began to teach that God, who had once become human in Jesus, had now become human again in a Negro, namely himself.⁵ He moved to Brooklyn, New York in 1917, and began to gather a small community of believers. That year he took the name Reverend Major

⁴ David T. Shannon, *Black Witness to the Apostolic Faith* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Co., 1985), 46-47.

⁵ Albert J. Raboteau, *Caanan Land A Religious History of African Americans*, 98.

Jealous (M.J.) Divine, suggesting perhaps that his identity as the new incarnation of God. His followers simply addressed him as Father Divine whose flock avoided alcohol, tobacco, gambling, racial prejudice, and sexual intercourse. His emphasis on salvation from disease, hunger, poverty, discrimination, and war in this world addressed the needs of those who were tired of waiting for happiness in some other world. Father Divine offered them salvation in the here and now.

The concentration of black population in the cities and the development of new communication and entertainment media like radio and the phonograph spread black religious culture to a wide audience. Record companies produced “race records” specifically designed for black listeners. These included blues and jazz music, as well as 700 sermons recorded between 1925 and 1941 by Baptist preachers A.W. Nix, J.C. Burnett, and F.W. McGee, all accompanied by instrumental music and congregational singing. Radio stations featured black religious services or broadcast black preachers regularly to local listeners. Sheet music of gospel songs was published and sold to black choirs. At first, the music was controversial, as some ministers and congregations condemned it for sounding too much like blues or the singing of the sanctified congregations they disdained. Gradually, the music became more acceptable as congregations experienced its spiritual power.

The career of one of the most influential composers of gospel, Thomas A. Dorsey, illustrates the evolution of gospel blues. Known as “Georgia Tom” when he toured the country with blues singer Ma Rainey from 1923 to 1926, Dorsey underwent a conversion experience that turned him from secular to sacred music. He began to write gospel songs and to travel widely, selling his music to local church choirs. Eventually he was hired as

the music director of the influential Pilgrim Baptist Church in Chicago, where he was able to help develop gospel nationally by organizing an annual convention of gospel singers that brought together gospel choirs from around the country. “Precious Lord” and other Dorsey compositions were sung by generations of popular gospel soloists, many of them women such as Salle Martin, Willie Mae Ford Smith, Marion Williams, and Mahalia Jackson. They understood themselves to be primarily evangelists, that is, preachers of the gospel message through song. Gospel music had a major influence on twentieth-century black and white popular music, especially rhythm and blues. Many black singers and musicians owed their training to the music of the black churches.

Radio, records, and concerts also brought spirituals to whole new audiences. A succession of classical artists, including Roland Hayes, Paul Robeson, and Marian Anderson, featured renditions of the old slave songs in their concert tours around the world. Additionally, black literary figures celebrated the slaves’ religious music as one of America’s greatest contributions to world culture. For example, in his influential book of essays, *Souls of Black Folk*, published in 1903, W.E.B. Du Bois argued that the poetic beauty and wisdom of the slaves’ “sorrow songs” were equal to the best poetry of Europe. James Weldon Johnson, who was a novelist, teacher, U.S. consul to Venezuela and Nicaragua, and national secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), arranged volumes of spirituals for modern performance and wrote a volume of poetry based upon the chanted sermon of the “old-time” black preacher, called *God’s Trombones* (1927). Du Bois also directed and published a sociological study called *Negro Church* in 1903, and Carter G. Woodson, founder of Negro (now African-American) History Month, wrote *History of the Negro Church* in

1921. These are just a few examples of works that demonstrate the growing scholarly interest in the importance of African-American religious institutions and their associated forms of worship.

According to the Rev. Wyatt Tee Walker, in his book entitled *The Soul of Black Worship*, “No one needs to be struck by a two by four to recognize that the character of Christian worship in African –American churches is inherently different from that observed in churches of the dominant community.” In other words, black folk worship God in ways that are vastly different from most white people. In Rev. Walker’s opinion, one form of worship is not necessarily better than the other, but black worship is certainly *different*. And the root of this difference lies in our peculiar social history.⁶

The African-American church has only come this far by faith, determination, and lots of trial and error. We are still singing hymns that are the staple of the worship service, but at the same time many new genres have emerged that have changed the look (and sound) of African–American worship. If our ancestors were allowed to come back for a second look at “Sunday morning church,” I believe that as long as true worship was taking place, it would be “well with their soul.”

We have seen how the African American church has had the privilege of experiencing a rich history that did not come without pain and struggle. However, long before our ancestors traveled through their lives “looking to the hills from which came their strength” (Psalm 121:1, paraphrased) there was a Book that existed that portrayed worship in many different ways.

Next we shall examine how worship is portrayed in the Bible.

⁶ Rev. Wyatt Tee Walker, *The Soul of Black Worship* (New York, New York: Martin Luther King Fellows Press, 2002), 1-2.

CHAPTER 3: THE PORTRAYAL OF WORSHIP IN THE BIBLE

OLD TESTAMENT

Early Christianity differed strikingly from other religions in the Roman world in that it had no cult statues, temples, or regular sacrifices (whether of animals or produce), or the customary musical accompaniment. Christian worship had a primarily verbal character, and in this respect it was similar to synagogue Judaism, with which it had strong historical ties.⁷

Human beings have worshipped God from the beginning of history. Adam and Eve had fellowship regularly with God in the Garden of Eden. (Gen.3:8). Cain and Abel both brought offerings (from the Hebrew *Minchah*, “gift, tribute”), unto the Lord (Gen. 4:3,4); the descendants of Seth called “upon the name of the Lord” (Gen.4:26). Noah built an altar to the Lord for a burnt offering after the flood. (Gen. 8:20). Abraham dotted the landscape of the Promised Land with altars for burnt offerings to the Lord and talked intimately with Him. (Gen. 12:7, 8; 13:4,18; 22:9; 22:11-18)

Not until after the exodus, when the tabernacle was built at Mount Sinai, however, did *public* worship become formalized. Thereafter, regular sacrifices were performed daily and especially on the Sabbath, and God established several annual religious feasts as occasions for Israelite public worship. (Ex. 23:14-17; Lev. 1-7; Deut 12;16)

This worship later became centralized around the temple in Jerusalem (*cf.* David’s plans as recorded in 1 Chr.: 22-26). When the temple was destroyed in 586 B.C., the Jews

⁷ Anchor Bible Dictionary, Vol.6, s.v. “Christianity.”

built synagogues as places of instruction and worship while they were in exile and wherever they settled. These buildings continued to be used for worship even after the building of the second temple under the leadership of Zerubbabel. (Ezra 3-6)

Worship in the early church took place both in the Jerusalem temple and in private homes (Acts 2:46-47). Outside of Jerusalem, Christians worshipped, as long as they were permitted, in the synagogues, and when that was no longer allowed, they met elsewhere for worship, usually in private homes or sometimes in public halls (Acts 19:9,10)

Two key principles govern Christian worship, and these principles are outlined for us in the Bible. First, true worship takes place in spirit and in truth. (John 4:23). In other words, worship must take place according to God's revelation of Himself in the Son. (John 14:6) Likewise, it involves the human spirit and not just the mind, as well as the manifestations of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:7-12). Second, the practice of Christian worship must correspond to the New Testament pattern for the church. We as 21st century believers ought to desire, seek and expect as the norm for the church and ourselves as individuals all elements found in the worship experience of the New Testament (*cf.* the hermeneutical principle discussed in the introduction to Acts).

The key feature of Old Testament worship was the sacrificial system. (Num. 28-29) Since the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross fulfilled this system, there is no longer any need for the shedding of blood as part of Christian worship. (Heb. 9:1-10) Through the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, the New Testament church continually commemorated this "once and for all" sacrifice of Christ. Additionally, the church is exhorted to offer "the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips

giving thanks to his name” (Heb. 13:15) and to present our bodies as “a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God.” (Rom. 12:1)

The Bible makes it clear that praising God is also an essential element of worship. It was key in Israel’s worship of God and should be key in our worship of God as well. One crucial way to worship God is by singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. The Old Testament abounds with exhortations to sing unto the Lord. (Ps. 95:1; 98:1). At the time of the birth of Jesus, the entire heavenly host burst forth into a song of praise, and the New Testament Church was a singing community. The songs of New Testament Christians were sung either with the mind (a known human language) or with the Spirit (tongues). Under no circumstances did they view singing as a form of entertainment.⁸

Another important element of worship that is portrayed in the Bible is seeking the face of God through prayer. The Old Testament saints constantly communicated with God through prayer. It was prayer that let God know that it was Him and Him alone that people looked to for help, deliverance, and blessings. But I believe that it was more than the prayer that moved the hand of God. In Paul’s letter to the Philippian church he commanded them to “Be careful for nothing, but in every thing by prayer and supplication **with thanksgiving** let your requests be made known unto God.”(4:6) At all times Christian prayer must be accompanied by thanksgiving, for it is in the expressions of thanks to God that adoration begins to spring up from the very depths of our soul, and out of that adoration true worship manifests itself.

Dancing is also an expression of worship that is portrayed in the Bible. For example, one of my favorite passages of scripture is found in Exodus 15:1-21. This

⁸ Mapson, Wendell J., Jr., *The Ministry of Music in the Black Church*. (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 1994), 75.

passage describes in detail the song that Moses and the children of Israel sang to the Lord that celebrated God's victory at the Red Sea over Egyptian powers. It is a hymn of praise and thanksgiving to God for His majesty, military might, and faithfulness to His people. "And Miriam, the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea." Miriam being among the children of Israel who were led out of Egypt under the leadership of Moses and God knew without question what God had done for them. She was thankful. Out of her thankfulness came singing and dancing. Out of her singing and dancing came the atmosphere of praise that translated into a glorious worship of God. The Israelites were victorious and were accustomed to celebrating victories by singing and dancing. According to *The Interpreters Bible*, "The place of the dance in O.T. worship has been ignored and the importance of solemn assemblies has been underlined." Nevertheless "The principal occasions of dancing are, in an ancient community, religious....Dancing, then, was of the essence of a primitive religious festival."⁹

Confession of sin was clearly an important part of Old Testament worship. God had established the Day of Atonement for the Israelites as a time for national confession of sin. We see more than a few men in the Bible who knew the importance of confession as part of the worship of God. For example, in his prayer at the dedication of the temple, Solomon acknowledged the importance of confession of sin. (1Ki.8:30-39) When Ezra and Nehemiah realized how far God's people had departed from His law, they led the

⁹ The Interpreters Bible, Vol. 1 (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1992), 946.

entire nation of Judah in an intense public prayer of confession. (Neh. 9) We also find the command to confess our sins one to another in the book of James,

The bringing of tithes and offerings in Old Testament worship cannot be ignored. Whenever God's people came together in the courts of the Lord, they were instructed to bring tithes and offerings. Similarly, Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth concerning the collection for the church in Jerusalem: "Upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come." The true worship of God must therefore provide the opportunity to present ones tithes and offerings to the Lord.

The Nature of Israelite Worship

Israel's worship was God-centered. It could be argued that Israel had no worship and therefore no song until God acted in a historical moment and set forth a plan of redemption to Moses at the burning bush.

Then the Lord said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey....." (Exodus 3:7,8 KJV)

Worship, then, was a natural and necessary consequence of God's redeeming activity in Israel's history.

Secondly, the worship of Israel was influenced by Israel's monotheistic faith, proclaimed time and time again through festivals and feasts and in the *Shema*.¹⁰ In the experience of Israelite worship this proclamation was given shape, form, and song.

¹⁰ *Anchor Bible Dictionary, Vol.5, s.v. "Shema."*

Thirdly, music was also a natural expression of the Israelites' faith and was meaningful only within the context of worship. Music became a natural handmaiden of Israel's theology. This fusion of worship, music, and theology can be seen from the beginning of Israel's history.

Fourth, there was a surprising degree of spontaneity and freedom in the Israelite practice of worship and in the compilation and selection of Israel's music. The Psalms themselves were not arranged in any logical sequence. It is interesting that the most important "songbook" of the Hebrew people has no identifiable literary structure. Even the divisions of Psalms into five sections may have been done to correspond with the five books of the Law.¹¹

In spite of the ritualism and legalism associated with the Jews of the Old Testament, there was a striking spontaneity evident in the selection of Scripture and psalms used in worship. In synagogue worship the "ruler" would summon the "minister" to invite someone from the congregation to lead in the *Shema*, as it was recited antiphonally, or to read the Scripture.

It is important to note that there was no contradiction between the worship aspect of Israel's life and the prophetic denouncements that seem to target the practice of worship. These two strands of Israel's tradition are not antithetical. It must be remembered that those prophets who denounced worship were addressing themselves to the ills and decay of the whole nation. They were condemning worship that had become poisoned with the nation's malady. The prophets knew that the health of the nation was reflected in worship practices. They saw the misuses of worship as symptoms of a dangerous disease. The music of the people had become anesthetizing; it was a

¹¹ J. Wendell Mapson, Jr., *The Ministry of Music in the Black Church*, 26.

tranquilizing drug, deadening the spirits of the people to the voice of God. It was not the practice of worship nor the use of music but the abuse and misuse of them that the prophets condemned, and rightly so.

Finally, the practice of worship and the use of music in the Old Testament provided the context out of which came practices of worship and song in the early church. Worship and song form one of the bridges that connect the “old” and the “new.”

Worship in The New Testament

Many of the forms and practices of worship in the New Testament were borrowed from the structures and content of worship already in existence in the Jewish synagogue. Since many of the early Christians were Jews, it is obvious that they would bring into their new faith their Jewish background, which was steeped in tradition and meaning. For the first few decades there didn't seem to be a break between Judaism and the Christian religion. The link between Judaism and Christianity was the belief in the one God who had created heaven and earth.

One unique element in the New Testament worshipping community was the role of the Holy Spirit and His manifestations. Among His manifestations in the body of Christ were the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, special expressions of faith, gifts of healing, working of miracles, prophecy, distinguishing of spirits, speaking in tongues, and the interpretation of tongues. The charismatic nature of early Christian worship is further described in Paul's instructions: “When ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation.” (1Cor.14:26) In his correspondence with the Corinthians, Paul provided

principles by which to regulate that aspect of their worship. The overriding principle was that any exercise of the gifts of the Holy Spirit during worship had to strengthen and help the whole congregation.¹²

The Apostle Paul saw the act of worship as serving one end: to build up the family of God. This matter of building up the people of God is essential if music and worship are to be placed in their proper context.

The other unique element in New Testament worship was the celebration of the sacraments – baptism and the Lord’s Supper. The Lord’s Supper appears to have been observed daily among the believers right after Pentecost (Acts 2:46-47), and later at least weekly (Acts 20:7,11). Baptism, which was commanded by Christ, occurred as often as there were conversions and people were added to the church.

The early Christians worshipped on the first day of the week, which came to be known as Sunday (sun day), as opposed to the Sabbath of the Jews. The fact that the Christians chose the first day of the week, the day Christ had risen from the dead, is crucial in understanding the faith and worship in the early Christian church.

Where did the early Christians meet for worship? Those in Jerusalem met in the upper room and in private homes. However, it must be kept in mind that the whole community of faith gathered together in one place.

Ferdinand Hahn gives five principles necessary for understanding New Testament worship that bear noting: First, “The Christian community assembles for worship on the basis of God’s eschatological saving act in Christ, which demonstrates its power in the operation of the Holy Spirit”; Second, “In worship the edifying of the church takes place”; Third, “For the Christian community worship does not take place in a separate

¹² E Byron Anderson, *Worship Matters* (Nashville, Tennessee: Discipleship Resources, 1999), 94.

realm but in the midst of the existing world;” Fourth, “Worship can be properly ordered only when the freedom necessary for the operation of the Spirit remains;” and fifth, “The worship of Christians is dominated by God’s eschatological gift of salvation, and remains open to God’s future acts.”¹³

Having considered worship among the New Testament churches, it is necessary for the purpose of this project to look more specifically into the nature and function of music.

There is a scattering of references to music in the gospels. What is called the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) is a song modeled from the song of Hanna (1 Sam. 2:1-10). The Psalm of Zechariah (Luke 1:68-79), also called the Benedictus, was also borrowed from the Old Testament. The Glory in Excelsis (Luke 2:14) and Nunc Dimittis (Luke 2:29-32) are hymnic in composition and were found in the worship services of the early church.¹⁴

What about specific exhortations to “sing unto the Lord” in the New Testament? In Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 the church is instructed to “speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 5:19, NIV). The context of these verses suggests that the writer is showing the Christian the proper way to live. He contrasts the Christian life with the life of those who are given to “darkness”. In Colossians the author offers options to “falsehood,” which are lowliness, meekness, patience, and forbearance. It is within the

¹³ Ferdinand Hahn, *The Worship of the Early Church*, ed. John Reumann, trans. David E. Green (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1973), 214.

¹⁴ J. Wendell Mapson, Jr., *The Ministry of Music in the Black Church*, 29.

context of the new life in Christ that the church is admonished to “address one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.”

Ultimately, that which distinguishes the worship of the Old Testament from that of the early church is the person and work of Jesus Christ. The aim of worship is to come face to face with Jesus of Nazareth, who is the only begotten Son of God and the Lord of the church. It is through the act of worship that the church is empowered to do his will.¹⁵

It is through the act of worship that one experiences the liberating power of Jesus Christ. And with His liberating power the open door of justice can swing wide to bring freedom on several different levels. The fire of worship will always ignite a burning bush that first informs, then transforms, and subsequently reforms ones life.

In the next chapter we will examine how **true** worship equals justice and liberation

¹⁵ Samuel DeWitt Proctor, *The Substance of Things Hoped For* (New York, New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1999), 109.

CHAPTER 4: WORSHIP = JUSTICE AND LIBERATION

Worship, even from biblical times, was strongly connected to and often resulted in liberation and justice. In the Old Testament we observe the account of the children of Israel who worshipped the Lord with timbrels and dance as God delivered them from the slavery of the Egyptians. As they crossed the Red Sea and saw how God literally made a way out of no way, the Israelites gave glory to the God who delivered them.

In the New Testament, we see worship as a mighty weapon that brings about deliverance and justice. In the Book of Acts, we see Paul and Silas wrongfully beaten and imprisoned by the Phillipian jailer for their witness for Christ. However, as these two apostles praise and worship God for being found worthy to suffer, an earthquake takes place that not only shakes the foundation of the prison, but also opens its doors! Paul and Silas' praise and worship in the midst of difficulty was also witnessed by the jailer himself who wanted to know "What must I do to be saved" (Acts 16:25-30). It is here that we see that justice and liberation not only followed the worship of Paul and Silas but that the liberating power of the Holy Spirit was made available to the jailer as well.

These are two Scriptures that no doubt the early black slaves grabbed hold of in their struggle for liberation and justice in America. Although they were unable to read stories of the Israelites' escape from Egypt and their journey to the Promised Land, this story proved to be a focal point in their motivation to gather in secret for the sole purpose of glorifying God for the PROMISE of deliverance. Wyatt Tee Walker called singing

“the joy of black worship.”¹⁶ In the midst of enslavement, folk had to look for any emotional outlet that would shift the focus from physical pain to spiritual hope. Their singing was their connection to God.

The religious music of Black Christians was shaped in the crucible of slavery but it bespeaks the existentialist faith that was the flinch-pin of our survival. That music is grounded in the joy of our salvation: Jesus Christ. No matter what happened to us, how bitter our portion, black folks who trusted in the Lord never stopped singing the Lord’s song in a strange land, and these songs, which gave slaves spiritual and physical deliverance then, continue to have the same effect today.

When we take a close look at history we see that a close connection to God and a thorough involvement in the worship of God became the hallmark of the black church. However, the emotional content of the black worship experience cannot be ignored.

The attitude of black people when they came to worship is molded from oppression and depression. There is a peculiar sense of frustration and failure in their lives. They are frustrated because they see where they want to go, yet they realize where they are. They have a sense of failure, not because they have not achieved but because they have often had to excel beyond their white counterpart merely to claim a place in the waiting line.

When black people assemble for worship, they not only want but need release. They have to express themselves in a manner that will give vent to their pent-up emotions, usually for about two hours, and it is not unusual for the worship service to go

¹⁶ Wyatt Tee Walker, *The Soul of Black Worship* (New York, New York: Martin Luther King Fellows Press, 1984), 45.

longer than that. They have to express themselves freely without all of the societal restraints.¹⁷

Black people have gone through an identity crisis, both within themselves and in the larger community. They have always known who they are and for the most part Whose they are, but there are many negative influences which seek to distort their personal image.

When they assemble for worship they want to know that they are children of the King and that their Lord is on their side. The worship leader in the black-church tradition will be more effective and efficient if these basic concepts are kept in perspective.

First, there is the recollection of the past. This is remembering that the Lord has brought us a mighty long way. It is not an attempt to forget from whence we have come or how we have come. It is fully realizing and recalling that it has been by the ever-present and guiding hand of our God that we have come this far by faith.

We can hear this expressed in the black worship tradition of testimony: “When I think about how good God has been,” or “If it had not been for the Lord, I would not have made it.” Both of these are expressions of God’s providential and perpetual care in leading His people into their Promised Land.

Second, there is the affirmation of the present. This thought can be heard in the testimonial truth: “The Lord is blessing me right now.” It matters not how hard or harsh my present conditions may be, for I have the awareness and the assurance that the Lord is ever with me, and I am daily, presently, a recipient of His “now” blessings. This understanding and sensitivity to the affirmation of the present needs to be strongly

¹⁷ Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion – The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 106-107.

stressed because many persons have erroneously concluded that black worship is simply worldly directed. I think that this assumption is quite false. I have the expectation and hope for the future, knowing it is going to be better because I have the assurance *right now* of what the Lord is doing.

Third, there is the eschatological hope. “End-time” hope is based upon “now-time” goodness. We hear this expressed in the black worship tradition, “Just as soon as my feet strike Zion, I am going to lay down my heavy burdens.” This hopeful expression is based upon the nowness and nearness of Jesus Christ being a heavy-load carrier and a burden bearer. Now that’s liberating!

There are also psychological factors in the black worship experience that play an important part in the concept of justice and liberation. Within the black worship traditions, emotional stress and tension can be released and defense mechanisms maintained through the healthy expressions of others knowing, caring, and identifying with me. You will hear other expressions such as “That’s all right,” “Go ahead and help yourself,” or “I know what you mean.” These are all psychologically reinforcing to the health, hope, and wholeness of the individual. You are not alone. There are others here with you who have been through what you are going through, and there are others here who will help you by God’s grace to pass through your present situation.

There is also the affirmation of life within the black worship tradition. Life is worth living. No matter how difficult, no matter how dreadful or dismal my present lot may be, life is worth living. “I am going on – I am going to hold on to see what the end will be.”

“Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.” These and many other such expressions give light to the hope that black people experience when they come together for worship.

Out of the concept of justice and liberation in the context of worship there exists a sense of corporate community. In other words we are all in this together – your welfare is directly connected to my welfare. Black folk do not have a difficult time in rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep. Even today, there are whole neighborhoods and communities that adjust and alter their daily routine if a significant, well-known brother or sister is seriously ill or dies.

It has always been my conviction that the worship of God equals justice and liberation. However, there is an opposite school of thought that maintains that worship does not always translate into justice and liberation does not always follow suit. This mindset is often communicated quite effectively in the Psalms.

J. David Pleins in his book *The Psalms – Songs of Tragedy, Hope, and Justice* says, “Personal suffering and national disaster, individual hope and collective aspiration constitute the human spiritual terrain out of which the Psalms arise. To this day in our worship, the poets’ vocabulary of justice continues to draw out of us a response to suffering and injustice. The Psalms give voice to a variety of emotions that are all part of the struggle to build God’s world of justice.”¹⁸ The anger at oppression that the psalmist feels stands side by side with hope for human history. Despair over war finds its place next to joy for God’s creation. Underlying all the issues, however, are still more basic

¹⁸ J. David Pleins, *The Psalms – Songs of Tragedy, Hope and Justice* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books), 2.

concerns that form the heartbeat of the Psalms, namely the questions of suffering, social injustice and worship.

We see this example clearly displayed in the 137th Psalm vs. 1-4; “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us *required of us* mirth, *saying*, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?” (KJV)

The people described in this psalm are Babylonian people who were being held captive in a land that was not their home and are being forced to “sing a song”. They ask the question, “How can we sing a song in a strange land?” In other words, we are oppressed and we are suffering. They will sing a song but the singing will not be worship.

Life will often force us to “go through the motions” of worship, but these motions will do little to free us from our internal and external struggles.

I believe that when black people assemble for worship, they do not come as individuals but as co-participants who remember the challenges of the past that God brought them through, the successes of today and the hope of the future.

If we, as 21st century Christians, are to fully enjoy the sanctifying and liberating power of Jesus Christ within the context of worship, we need to examine some of the current streams of worship and try to figure out whether or not these various varieties of worship are working.

Part two will look at this phenomenon called worship more closely, and I will discuss what happened at the Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly as I attempted to introduce a new form of worship. Then I will venture “outside of my world” and discuss some of

the focus groups and seminars that were conducted at other churches. Closer attention will be given to the notion of whether contemporary worship music is superior to the more traditional forms that have existed for years.

I maintain that “We can have it both ways.”

PART 2

“The discipline of worship is part of a life that expands in knowing God, His power and His blessing. This discipline finds many expressions, from private praise to worshiping with the assembly, from singing with gladness to giving with sacrifice. But at the center of it all is a dynamic each disciple must come to realize: *My praise and worship will determine the dimensions of my forward advancement along the pathway of discipleship. I will advance no further than my heart of worship allows me. I may become deep in knowledge and brilliant in spiritual insights, but my worship before God will determine my true stature as a son or daughter and my maturity as a growing servant-disciple.*”¹⁹

Jack Hayford

¹⁹ Jack Hayford, *Living the Spirit Formed Life* (Ventura, California: Regal Books, A Division of Gospel Light, 2001), 173.

CHAPTER 5: THE CURRENT STREAMS OF WORSHIP – ARE THEY SUCCESSFUL?

Within the free church tradition, and more specifically across the present evangelical movement, there is evidence of a tremendous internal struggle over what it means to worship. Families, congregations, friendships and entire denominations have fractured over what is identified as an issue of worship style. Some prefer a more traditional, predictable environment, while others wish to be at the cutting edge of new programs and techniques. There are some who favor intellectual challenge over and against those who would make the claim that if one does not indulge the senses in order to trigger an emotional response, one cannot fully enter into worship, or indeed cannot be an “authentic Christian.”

Many controversies exist over the nature of music used in worship. Some are adamant that the only resource used should be the hymnbook; others never seem to be satisfied in their quest for new material or the ancillary technology with which to present it. In one service, chancel choirs are in; in another, pre-recorded or computer-sequenced music provides ambiance. There are current debates raging over whether to have a praise band accompanied by a praise and worship team (the model that I am trying to introduce in my church), or a worship director lead the congregational singing. There are endless treatises that argue over what type of musical idioms and language are appropriate for worship.

For some, visual imagery in worship – or lack thereof – is troublesome. Indeed the mere hint of ritual or sacrament is regarded with suspicion by some and craved by others. Written prayers or borrowed liturgies are welcomed in some circles; others find them empty and offensive. Sensitivity to issues of gender and inclusiveness are fundamental for some individuals; others insist on entrenching patriarchal or exclusive nomenclature. Many are simply not aware that there are profound theological and personal issues at stake when new forms of language are embraced or rejected.

In many evangelical congregations, the entire character of worship is determined largely by one or two individuals with a specific personal agenda and a supporting power base. Occasionally a congregation will work together deliberately to discern what, for them, is an appropriate corporate mode of worship language. In these instances, the question of how to worship is usually part of a larger, ongoing discussion over how to be the Body of Christ in community.

Each point of view, each perspective, carries with it some part of the totality of what worship signifies in the life of the believer and of the Christian community. Diversity in the worship setting can be a valuable asset; it prompts creativity from many voices and keeps worship vital and energized. But diversity without focus is ultimately destructive; competing forces can tear a congregation apart, creating wounds and pain, and rendering the whole congregation ineffectual.

What, then, lies at the heart of the controversy over the current streams of worship practices across the evangelical movement? Contrary to the declaration of many who have experienced frustration and discord on all sides of the issue, I believe the root cause is not simply one of contention over a particular worship style. Nor can subsequent

fallout resulting in congregational and denominational schisms be attributed ultimately to matters of power politics, manipulation, leadership style, or personal agendas. Although these aberrant manifestations surface as tangible evidence of existing tensions and conflict in worship practice, they are merely symptomatic of a complex of larger fundamental problems that I believe can be traced across the spectrum of most black churches.

To identify and understand the nature of these problems as they relate to worship, the field of inquiry must encompass not only the question of how we do church; it must also point to the motivational factors dealing with the self-understanding or identity of a worshipping community. Such factors include: a sense of history and tradition; matters of confession (as discussed in Chapter 3), theology and polity; and the social enculturation and modes of discourse evident within the dominant group or groups that constitute a particular worship setting. Although each congregation functions as a unique organism, and self-understanding and praxis varies from one group to another (and within all groups over time), there are fundamental similarities based on an encoding of common values and experience embedded deeply within the collective conscious of the evangelical mindset. And it is this very common ground that yields insight into the nature of both a flowering of diversity and the oft-resulting tension that mark many evangelical worship communities at this present time.²⁰

In many black churches it is evident that there is not a clear sense of the purpose of worship. A plethora of vague notions about what constitutes the nature and essence of worship is evidenced across the landscape of the black church despite many sincere

²⁰ Wendell J. Mapson, Jr., *Strange Fire: A Study of Worship in the African American Church* (St. Louis, Missouri: Hodale Press, Inc., 1996), 16-17.

endeavors to develop or orchestrate “meaningful worship experiences.” Indeed, experience is a key word signaling much of the current confusion and controversy over how to worship. When worship practice begins to focus on immediate gratification of the individual experience, and caters to personal agendas at the expense of a corporate will and mode of expression, the whole Body of Christ becomes malnourished and incapable of doing its work in the world and particularly in the local church. These insipid forms of worship lack significant theological or confessional motivation; there is a somewhat paradoxical rejection of both rational discourse and symbolic ritual, which downplays the role of mind and body in the worship act; there is little framework – implicit or explicit – on which to structure disciplined and consistent faith expression; and there is no apparent sense of the responsibility implicit or explicit in worship to become the Body of Christ, for the sake of community nurture and for the equipping of the saints for ministry.

In many instances worship does not reflect, reinforce or identify the theological position of most charismatic denominations. Rather, the tendency for many churches is to adopt a mode of seeker-sensitivity in worship. This consumer-oriented approach, operating under a somewhat pretentious notion of evangelism, simply reflects the seductive lure of popular culture, by marketing a potpourri of convenient and attractive worship programs and packages that are guaranteed to suit your lifestyle. Prevailing messages of comfort, prosperity, pleasure and heaven are central to the prayers, songs, and preaching of seeker-sensitive worship. Its techniques are based on an ideology of immediacy over process and attainment over growth, luring both seeker and committed alike into believing that the Christian faith experience is “hip” – appealing, trendy, superior, and powerful in the material sense – and involves little personal risk or

involvement. This is an erroneous and dangerous tactic which is already creating a serious identity crisis among the modern day worshipper. Why? Because too much stock is placed in the emotional experience or realm of feelings. This is the one area of human nature that the black church has traditionally regarded as an appropriate response mechanism, and for many it has become an exclusive outlet – the single gauge by which validity of faith is measured. In fact, “gut feeling” or the realm of emotion also internalizes and projects erogenous emotions, as well as feelings of misery, aggressiveness, and guilt – and these often become confused with appropriate spiritual behavior. When human feeling and emotion is compartmentalized from cerebral or sentient experience, the worshipper is no longer able to engage in a balanced or fully human response to worship.²¹

Are the current streams of worship **music** successful? It depends on who you ask. Rick Warren, in *The Purpose Driven Church*, says, “Not only did I underestimate the power of music when we began Saddleback, I made the mistake of trying to appeal to everybody’s taste. We’d alternate between traditional hymns, praise choruses, and contemporary Christian songs. We used classical, country, jazz, raggae, easy listening, and even rap. The crowd never knew what was coming next. The result: We didn’t please anybody, and we frustrated everybody. The style of music you choose to use in your services will be the most critical and controversial decisions you make in the life of your church. It may also be the most influential factor in determining who your church reaches for Christ and whether or not your church grows. You must match your music to the kind of people God wants your church to reach. I reject the idea that music styles can be judged as either “good” or “bad” music. Who decides this? The kind of music you like is

²¹ E. Byron Anderson, *Worship Matters*, 94.

determined by your background and culture.” Rick Warren goes on to say, “I’m amused whenever I hear Christians who resist contemporary Christian music say, ‘We need to get back to our musical roots.’ I wonder how far back they want to go. Some people assume that ‘hymns’ mentioned in Colossians 3:16 refer to the same style of music we call ‘hymns’ today. The truth is we don’t know what their hymns sounded like. But we do know that the New Testament churches used the style of music that matched the instruments and culture common to that day. Since they obviously didn’t have pianos or organs back then, their music wouldn’t have sounded at all like the music in our churches today. In Psalms we read that in biblical worship they used drums, clashing cymbals, loud trumpets, tambourines, and stringed instruments.”²²

Rick Warren goes on to say that in order to reach the church of “today” our worship must have both a spiritual and emotional impact on people. He says by “speeding up the tempo” and “keeping the lyrics updated,”(*paraphrased*) the worship experience should always appeal to the 21st century Christian.

Reverend Dr. Keith Burnett, the Senior Pastor of Church of The Pilgrim Holiness in Brooklyn, New York, says (*paraphrased*). “Having been raised in a diversified background that included the Methodist denomination and Holiness denomination, I developed a great love and respect for tradition. In the beginning I was uncomfortable with the contemporary style of worship music. Then I realized that the church was going through a transition. Gone were the days of using the “hymnbook only” style of worship. The church was now open to a freer way of praising God through praise choruses and dancing.

²² Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1995), 280, 281.

"I finally embraced new music through my wife who is Southern American who played Kurt Franklin and other contemporary artists. I realized that it was tradition that held me back. It was difficult to understand the words of the music. But I also realized that the church was losing young people because the music and worship style didn't appeal to them. I have come to the conclusion that if the music is Bible-based and propagates the gospel, it's ok. We must have a desire to praise the Lord in hymns AND choruses.

"I have been Pastor at Church of The Pilgrim Holiness for 1 year and I do not know if I am following what was done in the past, but I do know that there was a mandate from the Lord and I followed the mandate. We will utilize the monitor, liturgical dancing and such, but we will still use the hymnal. The church cannot stay stagnant. We must increase our repertoire and library to a degree of receptivity to the younger generation. They are not the church of tomorrow; they (the young people) are the church of today.

"I am open to the contemporary style of music because I have seen the church lose the youth as a result of the absence of a more modern mode of worship. I want to make the environment conducive to their growth. My goal is to prepare the young people for leadership. I grew up in an environment where young people were seen and not heard. It's time for the young people to be heard."²³

In its presentation *Fight over Faith* the narrator says that an aggressive effort must be made to bring people back into the fold. The premise of this documentary is that the Evangelical church has the problem of losing too many members because the management of the church has gone too far to the left. The reason for this departure is

²³ Keith Burnett, interview by author, 11 January 2007.

partly because the worship experience was not reaching the younger generation and some changes were already being made. Rev. Louis Pullo took the initiative and “revved up” the songs and “revved up” the tempo. The tempo increased and so did the crowd. He says “music must be about redemption, but it must also become savvier. The message cannot change, but the approach has to be different. Young people are turned off by tradition. We must appeal to the younger generation and explore genres that they can identify with. It’s not enough to use the organ alone anymore. If we want to be a successful church, we must be a changing church.”²⁴

Reverend Dr. Randy L. Ware, Senior. Pastor of Greater Mount Pleasant Church, Brooklyn, New York and Second Vice Moderator of the New York Missionary Baptist Association says, “When I came to Greater Mt. Pleasant the only choir in place was the ‘Celestial Voices.’ They only sang traditional songs and hymns from the hymnbook. There were no drums and certainly no guitar or other stringed instruments. I realized that there needed to be a change and so I SLOWLY began to transition the music department by introducing a new choir called ‘Echoes of Praise’. I needed a larger choir and I also, along with the younger people, needed some harmony. I combined the Celestial and Echoes to make a bigger choir and to add a mixture of both styles. 1st Sunday there is a mixture of both traditional and contemporary, 2nd Sunday (communion) traditional only, 3rd Sunday is anybody’s guess, and 4th Sunday (youth Sunday) contemporary only.

“The trend these days is to lean more toward the contemporary because it draws the younger people. However, I still have to hold on to the richness of the traditional style because some of the older folk, me included, don’t even understand what the contemporary message is. The church has shifted so far to the left that a lot of them have

²⁴ CNN, *Fight over Faith*, 14 November 2004.

become entertainment centers. At times the marquee on the outside of the church is really a billboard for the “party” going on inside. The younger folk love the contemporary because they are looking for some music to gyrate to. I prefer the old hymns because the theology behind them is more grounded and will always remind us as black people how we survived many struggles.

“I tolerate the contemporary style as long as the language is reflecting Jesus. We now have a thing called “Gangsta Gospel Rapp, I don’t go for that. You’re either saved or you’re not.

“I believe we need a blend of both traditional and contemporary. Most older folk will always gravitate to the traditional style, while the younger folk will more than likely draw to the contemporary music. We must find a way to blend both because we will always have a blend of both old and young people in our church and there must be something there for everybody.”²⁵

Most people that I talked to seemed to feel that even if the contemporary style of worship is not the prevailing form of the day, it is important that it exist somewhere in the Sunday morning worship experience. Or else the church would quickly resemble a Senior Citizens Tent Meeting – all hymn and no holler!

Upon my arrival at the Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly, clearly there existed a need for changes on many levels. I sensed that the congregation felt this way also. So I just KNEW that whatever I proposed in the way of changes would be readily accepted and folk would quickly fall into line. Easier said than done!

²⁵ Rev. Dr. Randy L. Ware, interview by author, 21 November 2006.

CHAPTER 6: EASIER SAID THAN DONE

(what went on at the Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly)

Someone once said that it is easier to change the church's theology than it is to change the order of worship. I am beginning to think that this is true. The Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly is unapologetically a traditional music church. I think that, at least until I came, one of their weaknesses was that no attention was paid to church history. Because of this, they began to confuse current traditions with orthodoxy. Many of the methods and tools that we use in churches today such as hymn singing, pianos, pipe organs, altar calls, and Sunday school were once considered worldly and even heretical. Now that these tools are widely accepted as gifts from God used to enhance worship, we have a new blacklist. Today's objections are aimed against innovations such as the use of synthesizers, drums, drama, video, liturgical dance, miming and many other genres.

The debate over what style of music should be used in worship is going to be one of the major points of conflict in local churches in the years ahead. Why do people take disagreement over worship styles so personally? It is because the way we worship is intimately connected with the way God made us. Worship is our personal expression of love for God. When someone criticizes the way you worship, you naturally take it as a personal offense.

I began my tenure as Pastor of the Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly on June 11th, 2005. From the very beginning I made it clear that the order of worship and the style of music that was already in place were going to change. As I stated earlier, there was no

organist even though there was an organ; there was no drummer, even though there was a set of drums; there was even a set of bongos, and no bongo player.

I grew up in the Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly. This church is a large part of my heritage, but even so, I always felt that not enough was being done to accommodate the various age groups within the church. The worship experience here literally defines Tradition. So here I am all grown up – left the church for many years – came back – and nothing has changed, except some people have died, and many have left. I find that the remnant that has remained is comprised of people who only stayed because they either didn't desire to go anywhere else because they had no other worship experience to compare this one to, or they knew that the worship experience needed an overhaul and was waiting for God to change the leadership and by this vehicle transformation would take place.

In September 2005 (3 months after I arrived), I put out an “open casting call” for a musician. Christopher Crenshaw from Atlanta Georgia was referred to me by a former member of BPA who had moved away many years ago. He was coming to New York on a full musical scholarship to Julliard School of Music. He came with a limited amount of experience in terms of directing a choir and quickly admitted that he doesn't read music but he's good at “picking up the chords.” I thought to myself, “This isn't going to be easy, but somebody is better than nobody.” I also wondered how he would be accepted by a Caribbean congregation. I decided to find out.

I introduced Chris to the congregation on Sunday, September 25th, 2005. It was communion Sunday and I thought, what better day than this? I suspect that even though the congregations had their doubts, just the fact that they were hearing the organ again

after so many years, gave them a sense of hope for the future. The melodious sounds of the organ were a breath of fresh air. It didn't take long for the members to appreciate the little bit of accompaniment and after a while folk began to look for Chris on Sunday mornings and they soon began to receive him as "one of us."

It wasn't long before I began to communicate my vision for the church with Chris. I explained to him that I wanted to form a Praise and Worship Team and I wanted him to direct it. **I expressed my desire to introduce new songs to the congregation and said that every now and then we would also follow a slightly different order of worship.**

How did I accomplish this? I began by first identifying the people in the congregation who performed well and knew how to lead worship. I called a meeting with fifteen people and explained to them that I wanted to start moving away from the hymnbook on "some" Sundays. Chris began to set up a schedule for rehearsals and it wasn't long before the "team" started meeting on Friday nights. New songs and choruses began to emerge. I began to see the team encouraged by the new form that was taking place. These same fifteen people who until now just sat and stared at the worship leaders on Sunday, clearly finding it an effort to become fully engaged, suddenly began to bloom right before my very eyes! Although I had my reservations, as I observed their enthusiasm and commitment to these new songs, I must confess that I too became excited and their enthusiasm and commitment served to make a world of difference in my expectations for the worship experience at BPA.

Around this same time, something else happened. A gentleman named Jeremy Williams began visiting the church. He had been invited on several occasions and finally

decided to pay us a visit. It was brought to my attention that he previously played the drums at the church he used to go to and so I immediately invited him to take his position on the empty drum stool and “help us out.” With Chris on the organ and Jeremy on the drums, the very atmosphere began to change on Sundays. Soon Jeremy began coming to the Praise Team rehearsals and it wasn’t long before there emerged an ensemble of voices singing new songs and a style of accompaniment that had never been heard at the church before.

It is important to note at this juncture just how phenomenal these changes are. The majority of people at Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly are from various Caribbean Islands. EVERY song that they sing ALWAYS has a calypso beat. Chris and Jeremy (coincidentally enough) are both from the State of Georgia. From the beginning I wondered how this was going to work out. I wondered how the “team” and the congregation were going to accept two men of different cultures. I am pleased to report that all of my doubts and fears worked themselves out, but it did not happen without an abundance of prayer.

I did not consult the congregation, I did not ask anybody for their opinion, I simply set a date when the Praise and Worship Team would debut and I prayed. And debut they did!

On Sunday January 8th, 2006 the Praise and Worship Team stood before the congregation along with Chris and Jeremy and sang like they had never sung before. I had announced to the congregation a week before that the team would be in place on the next Sunday and when they took their places on January 8th, there were more

expressions of bewilderment than skepticism. But we ignored the faces and embraced the Spirit.

In the beginning, the congregation didn't know how to respond to this new presentation and the team didn't quite know how to respond to their lukewarm response. But they sang anyway. They rehearsed well and they sang well, but the response was less than encouraging. I needed to find out what was wrong. But I decided not to ask the congregation yet. Instead I chose to observe the team on their Sundays, the first and third. I observed them from the pulpit and from the pews. All of a sudden I realized what was missing. Absent was the blend of both traditional music and contemporary. In his zeal to embrace my vision and help it to come to pass, Chris taught the Team new music, but completely ignored the fact that this was a hymnbook church. What was the Pastor to do? I called a meeting with Chris and the Team and explained to them that we needed to interject the traditional hymns with the new contemporary music. And so we developed a format where the team would sing two or three contemporary choruses and then ask the congregation to join them in singing a few songs from the hymnbook.

At the same time I took the opportunity to change a few things on the Order of Worship. The team would sing, then we would have Scripture readings, then prayer, a few more songs and then I would preach. The announcements would be read at the end of the service along with the acknowledgement of the visitors, the offering, and my parting remarks. (See appendix 1) This new "order" was quickly rejected. Folk adamantly balked about how "we've been having church like this for years, and there ain't nothing wrong with it." This "order" was way too "out of order" for them. They claimed that something was missing although they couldn't tell me what the "something" was. Some even

claimed that the Holy Spirit was not present because things just didn't "flow." I could tell that changes in the Order of Worship itself would be a long time coming. I didn't have the energy, so I left them alone – for now! But the revised music format was enthusiastically received. The congregation began singing along with the team, trying to learn the words to the songs, and they were equally happy when the time came for them to open their hymnbook and sing the traditional songs of the church.

As I watched them on Sundays, an overwhelming sense of pride and accomplishment came over me. It was in my observations of them that a new level of curiosity began to tug at my spirit. I began to think, "What is their definition of worship? What do they think is supposed to happen in the context of the worship service?" Clearly their idea of worship and my understanding of it had to be somewhat different. After all, until I arrived, their insipid form of praise seemed to be perfectly all right with most of them.

On Saturday October 28th, 2006 as part of our Women's Weekend I held a workshop entitled "God Is Looking for You." (Appendix 2) Thirty women attended from Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly and other churches. There was not only an overwhelming response to the seminar itself, but everyone seemed anxious and excited to discuss the topic. The scriptural reference was taken from John 4:23. *"But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such to worship Him."* (KJV) We discussed in detail the various aspects of worship. I raised the question, "What is the difference between worship, praise and devotions?"

Most agreed that worship involves more than singing. It involves prayer, meditation, reading scripture, etc. In other words, worship is a heading under which the many aspects of worship fall. Praise is lifting one's voice in adoration and exaltation to God. In other words, praise involves the opening of our mouth. And devotion is just that: the time we take to devote to the worship, praise, reading, praying, etc. Most of us agreed that there seems to be a lot of confusion in the church regarding the difference between worship, praise and devotions. I think that after sharing our thoughts and breaking into groups to discuss them further, we all came away with a better understanding of the differences among the three. We also talked at length about some of the hindrances to worship and how the many "distractions" that occur during the worship experience serve as chief among them.

However, the most heated discussion arose when the topic of music came up. Most of the attendees were somewhere between 30 to 60 years of age. Some of them were in their 80's. Their views about whether the music in church should be one thing or the other were clear. The battle lines were quickly drawn. Most seemed to agree with some of the opinions drawn from previous interviews and references (see Chapter 5).

The overall consensus is that a lot of the contemporary music these days was born out of someone's tragedy, struggle, mistake or pain. Therefore many of the words have no theological base. They are merely songs sung to the prevailing hip-hop beat of the day.

Many also felt that upon careful observation of the congregation, when this kind of music was going on, folk didn't know or seem to care about the words. It was the beat of the drums and the rhythm of the band, and the back and forth rocking of the people

that folk made their investment in. However, many agreed that in order for you to attract and keep the younger generation, there has to be some rockin' going on! This demographic is simply not going to sit for two hours in church and not be able to relate to something other than the preached word. And most of the time it isn't even the preached word – it's the music that keeps them coming.

There were more than enough that cast their lot with the traditional form of music. One of the Sisters (about 35 years old) got up and stated that while she enjoys contemporary music, it is the old time hymns of the church that keep her going, especially when she's down in spirit and needs to be lifted up, or discouraged and needs to hear "Blessed Assurance Jesus Is Mine" so that she can garner enough strength to wipe her tears away. She says Kurt Franklin and Alvin Slaughter can't do that for her.

Many others said that they would take the hymn over rock and roll any day. According to some, the traditional music has history, form, and a scripture base. Some said that the hymns are simple yet strengthening. Some claimed it's a "no-brainer", that the traditional hymns have what contemporary does not have and never will – tradition!

The workshop proved to be a valuable educational tool. It never surprises me what God can do when His people get together to share ideas and flesh out their different views. Everyone came away with an increased sense of awareness with regard to how we worship and why we worship. All of us agreed that a great deal of improvement is needed on both the individual and corporate level. More focus and attention needs to be given to the Person whom we worship – God. We talked a lot about the attributes of God and how insipid our worship has become when we hold it up to the worthiness of Him who deserves all of our praise.

A few weeks later I conducted an “Open Form” based on the section in *The Daily Devotional Bible* titled “Eleven Truths about Lifestyle Worship” (Appendix 3). It was around these eleven truths that a very rich discussion about worship evolved. **The difference between the workshop and the open forum is that ultimately the workshop focused on music, but the forum focused on the individual. In other words, the workshop focused on the external elements of worship, whereas the forum focused on the internal preparedness of one’s ability to worship “in spirit and in truth.”** We discussed how true worship cannot be really “true” unless we understand that everyone is a worshipper. According to the third “truth,” “The question is never, ‘Will a person worship?’ but rather ‘Who or what will he/she worship?’” We talked about how the saints of God must embrace the fact that, although God will not force us to worship Him, that does not mean that there is an obligation to worship based on who God is. God does not NEED our worship (the seventh “truth”). He is complete, independent, and self-sufficient. We, on the other hand, are incomplete without him, totally dependant upon him, and we look to him for our sufficiency.

I assigned a “truth” to eleven different people and asked them to make a presentation based upon the material provided. By the time we were finished (about four hours later), we all agreed that worship must BEGIN on the inside in order for it to be real on the outside. You can sing, dance, holler, clap, and run, but it must be our true connectedness to God and His principles that are working on the inside that manifest themselves on the outside that makes the worship of God authentic.

The Praise and Worship Team has been in place for fifteen months. It was now time to ask the “Team “and the congregation some questions. **On January 7th, 2007 I**

conducted another survey. (Appendix 4). Here are the questions and a few excerpts of their answers.

Q. It has been approximately 15 months since our newly formed Praise and Worship Team has debuted. Reflecting upon what the worship experience was and what it has become, what are some of your thoughts?

A. “The team is a good thing. I’ve enjoyed singing with the group. The new songs we’ve learned are good too. On the other hand, the team needs to be in place more often. The more we sing together the better we will become.”

A. “Worship in the past at BPA has shown a great deal of improvement. The service was once long and drawn out, but has now become excited and more people are getting involved.”

A. “As a worship team member and one that has sat in the congregation on my “off” Sundays, I have grown tremendously in vocal abilities and in my perspective on worship. I believe more people are involved as well. As a result the congregation is more involved. Before, the congregation was aloof in its worship, but all of that has changed.”

Q. As persons who have had the opportunity to be a part of the “team” and at other times part of the congregation, to what degree, if any, do you think progress has been made here at BPA?

A. “Though the initial transition was met with resistance, the congregation has slowly adopted the new way of worship.”

A. “The first sign of progress was made when a minister of music was put in place. This was a great improvement and caused others and their talents to step up and be seen and heard.”

A. “I think we have made progress, but it seems we have taken a few steps forward and many backwards because at the moment we don’t have anyone to play the organ and practice us. So I’m looking forward to a new year to see what we can come up with as a team to make the praise ministry work.”

Q. Do you prefer hymns AND contemporary songs sung on Sunday, or do you prefer one type of music over the other? WHY?

A. “Truly speaking, the worship service sets the pace for the entire service. Most contemporary songs come from the traditional hymns that were once sung. With that being said, I would prefer the singing of the hymns because the hymns talk about the writers experience and what they passed through.”

A. “I don’t have a preference. I prefer a little bit of both.”

A. “Both. I like a variety because it allows something for everyone to enjoy. This way everyone can get involved in the worship experience. As we evolve so must our sound and style but that doesn’t mean we shouldn’t forget about the old hymns. So the combination works!”

Q. What suggestions do you have that you think can improve our worship experience here at BPA?

A. “I suggest that more people be recruited to join the worship team.”
“Musicians definitely make the difference so we have to pray for a minister of music and a band.”

A. “More rehearsals!”

A. “The congregation needs to learn more contemporary songs. That way they’ll stop looking and start worshipping along with the team.”

Q. What changes, if any, do you think need to be made NOW?

A. “We need to briefly review songs for 15 minutes before service so that we are more synchronized.”

A. “More prayer! As we assemble ourselves together more often as a team the Lord will direct our path.”

A. “We need to be more organized. And we need to start on time.”

Someone said, “I think we have made progress but it seems that we have taken a few steps forward and many backward because at the moment we don’t have anybody to play the organ and practice us.” In **some** ways this statement is truer than I care to admit. Chris Crenshaw came to us from Georgia on a two- year scholarship to Julliard School of Music. His two years have expired, but in the meantime he has been offered a position with Lincoln Center. Chris Crenshaw’s last day at the Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly was Sunday, December 17th, 2006. It was an emotional good-bye. He appreciated the once-in-a-lifetime experience of being an integral part of the BPA family. He was a perfect fit for us at this place in time. However, Chris said that his commitment to Lincoln Center has to take priority over anything else and because the schedules conflicted (he practices and plays with Lincoln Center every Sunday), he had to leave.

I now find myself looking for a new minister of music....again.

Jeremy Williams (the drummer) is still with us. The good part of all of this is that the Praise and Worship Team is still in place and more committed than ever. With or without music accompaniment they stand shoulder to shoulder and sing to the honor and glory of God. As a matter of fact it seems to me that they sing with more determination than ever. It’s as though they are saying “Chris may be gone, but we are here to stay!”

Another good part of all of this is that the congregation as a whole has been made more aware of the importance of having good music during the worship service. In a strange way Chris's leaving has been a good thing. The congregation has been able to see how much better the worship experience is when the organ is being played, the drums are beating, and the team is singing.

The workshops and seminars were a good thing too. People were given a chance to express themselves in ways that they had not before. Some have said that the workshops were not only liberating, but raised their level of awareness about worship in general. Many were amazed at how anesthetizing insipid worship can be. Until they began talking about it in the workshops and seminars at the church, some believed that they couldn't go much farther in their worship of God. The workshops and seminars let them know that worship is an ongoing, liberating experience that always draws one closer to God. Worship at BPA is more alive and vibrant and the congregation as a whole participates with a renewed enthusiasm.

The Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly is in corporate and individual prayer for a minister of music. In the meantime the general consensus is that we are not what we want to be, but we have come a long way from what we used to be.

To God Be the Glory, Great Things He Has Done!

CHAPTER 7: OUTSIDE OF MY WORLD

While the Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly proved to be fertile ground where I was able to plant many seeds of opportunities for change and renewed worship forms, there were other church settings and religious groups where I presented my proposal for thoughts and input. It was necessary for me to travel outside of the world of my own church setting in order to find out what other folk thought about this topic of worship and to see if there was any common ground upon which we all stood.

As I stated in my proposal, this demonstration project would not be germane to the Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly. At the outset I stated that some of my colleagues and lay persons alike share an interest in exploring the multifaceted layers of worship. Many people shared my curiosity about the reasons why different worship styles dictate the reason why some people come to church.

As I traveled outside of the four walls of the Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly, some interesting views began to emerge.

In December 2005 I was invited to teach Worship at the Ministerial Training Institute of the First Episcopal District of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. I introduced the topic by way of general discussion. We talked about how in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the Order of Worship is the same throughout. *The Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* mandates this.²⁶ All of my

²⁶The African Methodist Episcopal Church, *The Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Nashville, Tennessee: AMEC Publishing House, 1997), 467.

students agreed that the worship experience had become boring and stale. They felt that for the most part the congregation was simply going through the motions and left the worship service the same way that they came in. Most of their churches had already embraced the more contemporary style of worship. They had Praise and Worship Teams. They had liturgical dancers, mimes, drums, guitars, tambourines, bongos, organ, piano and synthesizers. They had it all! But some stated that with every imaginable musical instrument and choir in place, something was still missing. Most felt that major changes in the Order of Worship were sorely needed. There was too much “order” in the Order of Worship. More importantly, they felt that the presence of the Holy Spirit was not there. Church had become a “plop down in the pew – sit back and enjoy the show” experience. They all agreed that there was something wrong with this all-too-common scenario.

Eventually I asked the big question. Given the opportunity, what changes would YOU make in your own church setting that would provide variety yet still keep God at the forefront of worship?

I asked each of them to create their own Order of Worship. One person submitted an order of worship that was very simplistic in its format, yet the message was very interesting. Every element of the service began with the word “worship” (Appendix 5). Worship in song, worship in dance, worship through the preached word, etc. I asked my student, why this format? A simple but interesting answer followed. “If people **see** the word worship before each activity it will send a subliminal message that **everything** we participate in during the church service is rooted and grounded in the worship of God. Every song we sing, every dance we witness, every prayer that is prayed is God-centered and by virtue of the word worship preceding every act that we do, an awareness will be

raised as to the real reason why we are in church in the first place. It is only at the end where the announcements and welcome are, that the word “worship” is not necessary.”

Another student submitted an Order of Worship that was far more detailed and involved than the first (Appendix 6). In this rendering, my student felt it was necessary to have a Processional, and after that a Time of meditation, then a Hymn of Praise, and then the Invocation. He felt that these components of worship not only cannot be omitted, but should be strategically placed at the beginning of the service. He said that it’s important that the format set the tone at the beginning, and this tone should be carried throughout the service. People must know that whatever baggage you came into the church with, it becomes diminished when held up to the pageantry of the processional followed by the spirituality of the meditation and then the Hymn of Praise. He said that there exists a certain “flow” in this pattern that should be established early on that would be hard to depart from.

Clearly, everyone was more than happy to weigh in on their opinion of what was wrong with worship at their individual churches. I didn’t ask them to offer their views on what kind of worship they preferred, I only asked them to tell me what they would change about the worship service given the opportunity. Obviously, many changes would take place. My students expressed their concerns for the church not only on an individual level, but also on the corporate level. Everybody agreed that there is an urgent cry for change across all denominations. The worship of God is just not what it should be. All appreciated the opportunity to express their gift of creativity and spirituality. We ended the last day of class in prayer that God would wake up the leaders of the Church so that they would know that God is still a God who loves movement and improvement.

In April 2006, I was invited to facilitate a seminar at the AME Institute. I wanted to know from this group what their thoughts were about this controversial subject of traditional worship vs. contemporary. Again some interesting excerpts:

“Traditional or contemporary worship is a topic that should be of concern to anyone who is in charge of preparing worship services. How many times have we heard from the older members of our congregations that they do not like ‘new stuff’ that we have introduced into our worship service? If we are totally traditionally oriented how many times do we hear the younger folks complaining about being bored? And in some cases it is almost impossible to get new persons, both young and old to join our congregation due to the staunch traditionalism practices of many churches today. **I believe that education is the key.** Our congregations, both young and old need to understand that all types of worship – interpretive dance, mime – all are acceptable praises unto God as long as it is done in the right frame of mind and in the end God is glorified.” (Appendix 7)

“Traditional worship versus contemporary worship is more accurately defined as the quality of the worship experience. Either form can have the impact of effectively ushering the worshipper into a closer relationship with God. It must be recognized that **each component of worship is dependant on the other elements.** Therefore, the nature of the format builds into the “character of the church” It is the “character” which provides the criteria used to make a decision about joining a fellowship.” (Appendix 8)

Two interesting points have been noted: education is key, and each component of worship is dependant on the others. I believe that in many instances new forms of worship are introduced into the church setting without first educating the congregation

about what worship is and what it isn't. Education will enable people to be more receptive to something new. It also helps to dispel the notion that if too many instruments are used, too much noise is made, it must not be Godly. Worship leaders need to be educated too. They must be made to understand that they are not at the "Stellar Awards" and are not on stage for the sole purpose of entertainment

Worship leaders in particular must also know that each element of worship is dependant on the other. The dancers, the drummer, the organist, etc., must be in concert with one another so that each part creates the sum of a melodious and spiritual whole.

On Saturday November 4th, 2006, I held a focus group at Macedonia Church. (Appendix 9) In addition to my "usual" questions concerning worship (again there were some interesting comments), I raised the question about the Power Point presentations. Much to my surprise, a lot of people felt that the Power Point displays during church were more of a distraction than anything else. Some said that, given the time they take looking up and down at the screen, it would be better to put the words to the songs in the bulletin. I believe that some folk are fascinated with the idea of their church rising to the expectations of the contemporary congregants, but for the most part people say Power Point looks good – but they're not so sure of the practicality of it all.

In December 2007 I solicited comments from other denominations. Her are a few interesting responses. Only the name of the church is referenced.

Shiloh Baptist Church, New Rochelle: "I'm not sure I have a definitive answer for you, but I'm going to tackle this because I realize that it's been on my mind also. And there are some things that we talked about that I had trouble adjusting to. I believe there is a certain amount of success (blended worship) because at Shiloh, we have seen a certain

amount of young people. And they are taking an active role in the church. There is though, a lot of ambivalence on the part of the old-line members.”

There is, though, a lot of ambivalence on the part of the old-line members. We often hear them talking among themselves about some of the things that are becoming the new norm of service, for example the Praise Dance Ministry, and the Mime Ministry. Some have even voiced objections about the six-piece band that plays for the choirs. Some of the arrangements of the old songs confuses and disturbs many of our seniors. In all things, change is difficult. This is no different. Just because it’s happening in the church, it’s still change.”

Way of the Cross Holy Church, Boston Mass Minister. “X” says “the praise and worship section is successful because it helps people connect with the Spirit of God while the choir unifies and prepares everyone to be in unity with the Mind of Christ. She believes that the devotional period is outdated and often used as a sounding board for people to talk incessantly without regard to others or the Spirit of God.

In her church, Minister. “X” does not think that the service flows very well. Each type of worship tends to stand on its own and does not flow with the Spirit of God. She believes that worship should be a constant ebb and flow of events that unify the service in accordance to the Spirit of God. People are too “tied to what happens next” instead of letting the Spirit move the service to where the Spirit wants it to go.”

At Dayspring Glory Baptist Church I had the opportunity of interviewing a gentleman who has a unique church membership history. He is originally from **Accra Ghana**. He was raised in the Methodist tradition there. He had begun pursuing the ministry in Africa and is currently preparing to step into that calling.

In the African Methodist tradition he was used to drums and dancing which were incorporated into the worship experience. However, he expressed that he found this “traditional” Methodist worship uninspiring. He equated it to the “high” church of the Anglican or Catholic traditions.

Upon coming to the States he attended several different churches of differing denominations. He eventually settled at Dayspring Glory Baptist Church. He found there a vibrant congregation that consists primarily of African emigrants which suited his desires on both counts.

He shared with me that his church uses a combination of traditional and contemporary (and unique but typically African) expressions of worship. They have a church bulletin that outlines the order of service but it is not typically adhered to. Tambourines, keyboards, horns, drums and other percussion instruments are seamlessly incorporated into the worship. Dance, in both choreographed and spontaneous forms is also used.”

I think that what has emerged out of all of these conversations is the fact that the controversy surrounding what type of worship we have in our churches is a growing concern across the board. People seemed to want to talk about it mainly because they were either afraid to discuss it within the church, or were never given the opportunity to discuss it at all.

The surveys, the workshops, and the interviews were a safe place for everyone to express their innermost thoughts and concerns. It seems that when we talk about the problems that exist in our churches concerning worship, we have more commonalities than we have differences.

All would agree that we worship God with our hearts as well as our heads. To bring the head, the instruments, and the music whether traditional or contemporary, and leave one's heart at home makes for an empty worship experience. The head is important too. No head and our worship becomes an exhibition in unbridled emotion, a religious free-for-all, a spiritual exercise in self-indulgence, a wild party where the honoree slips out the back door, while the guests do not know he's gone, and do not care.

All would agree that both the traditional styles and the contemporary styles are not only needed, but are required if the Church is to remain a place where "all are welcome".

PART 3

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

ON THE MATTER OF COMPETENCY

THE THEOLOGY OF TRANSFORMATION

CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 8: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

In theological reflection it is vital to understand our own culture and how it may be changing. If we unthinkingly adopt our culture's way of putting questions and deciding what is true, we simply accommodate Christianity to the prevailing attitudes of our culture. That yields a monologue in which we are prisoners of our own time; we may be hip or super cool, but we are prisoners nonetheless. I believe that sound theological thought involves a dialogue between the present and the Christian past, between contemporary experience and culture on the one hand, and Scripture and the Christian tradition on the other hand. The conversation should move in both directions, for contemporary experience and culture raise questions to the Christian heritage, but that heritage also challenges the current scene. The important thing to remember, in my view, is that in theology the hermeneutical task involves a complex conversation in which both the past and present are interpreted. This past and present must include experience, culture, the Bible, and tradition.

How does theological reflection speak to this controversial topic of worship?

I am convinced that if the manner of our worship is to be in spirit and in truth we are worshipping the way that we should. We may descend amongst the ritualism or the formalism, and the liturgy of Lutheranism or Episcopalianism. We may go amongst some of the most vibrant charismatic and Pentecostal enthusiastic worship we could ever find. We may be dropped in a few Baptist churches that go hymn, prayer, hymn, prayer, hymn, offering, hymn, message, hymn, benediction, and right across the board everyone will

respond if they are the people of God. Everyone single one of them will probably say the same thing. We are seeking to worship in spirit and in truth. The manner is universal, the mode is distinguishable. We may argue that one mode is better or one mode is more right or one mode is more conducive to the way we feel, but we cannot say that worshipping in spirit and in truth means this unless we are prepared to add a couple of words. We may say, worship in spirit and in truth means this to me, or that us, or right now it means this, or in here it means that, but it is the ultimate in arrogance to assume that all the cultures and places and possibilities and diversities which the spirit of God has created; a spirit who is like fire that cannot be contained and a wind from which we cannot find its source and origin, it is ridiculous to assume that one particular mode is the issue. That's why the Bible does not address mode; that's why it address manner to give us the freedom with the mode on the basis of manner.

Some people might ask, "If the manner of acceptable worship is so important and it is to be in spirit and truth, tell us what is in spirit and in truth? How would we be able to identify a congregation that is committed to that manner of worship?" Number one, to worship in spirit and in truth is to engage in Biblical worship, which is grounded in the truth of scripture. In other words, it doesn't start with Mr. and Mrs. Feelgood, it starts with the Bible. It starts with the revelation of God; it starts with our encounter of Him. It begins with God and His glory and then comes secondly to our preferences and our needs and our preoccupations.

No one can worship God properly unless they are theological and that means they have to have a knowledge of God as it is revealed to us in the Bible. There must be a theological foundation upon which to build our worship and praise. In other words, it's

what we know from the Bible that gives us the lips to praise. There's no point in trying to pump ourselves up, and even when we manage to do that, there is still a lot of stuff going on that remains discouraging. So if we're looking to the "pumping" to energize and propel us to worship, then we'll never really worship. It is only what I KNOW about my Lord and my God that fills my heart with praise and my lips with song, it is knowing that I have a "Blessed assurance that Jesus is mine" that authenticates my worship and praise. We may come out of a situation in the middle of the week where things are going poorly for us; someone made a sales call and they could tell by the way the guy said, "I'll be getting back in touch with you" that you'll never hear from him again. Perhaps someone was concerned because the circumstances they left at home or the preoccupation with the daily grind was getting them down. Perhaps someone received dreadful news of the loss of a loved one or perhaps their marriage has begun to disintegrate. Now where is there going to be praise in all of this unless you're able to retreat to the Bible and say, "God moves in mysterious ways His wonders to perform;" or you say to yourself, "Things are not the way I want them to be, and I am not all that I ought to be, but I know 'The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.'" (Psalm 23 KJV) It is this theological reflection that brings equilibrium. In other words the circumstances haven't changed – there is still trouble everywhere, but it is what I know about my God and what He has done for me in the past that bolsters my confidence to know that He will care for me in the present and in the future.

When you come to worship and when I come to worship out of that span – I believe that that’s when we really pay attention to the songs whether they are contemporary or traditional and a wonderful authentic praise begins to swell up in our souls. It is when we reflect upon the wondrous power of God and all of His attributes that our worship is transformed from how we feel to acknowledging whose we are.

Worship is Biblical; it must include theological reflection – that’s why we’re **not** singing Kum Ba Yah all of the time. Does anyone know what Kum Ba Yah was about? But because worship is Biblical and must include theological reflection, we **are** singing, “A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing; our helper He, amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing. For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe; His craft and power are great, and armed with cruel hate, on earth is not his equal.”²⁷

Worship is a conscious activity - it is not a glandular condition. It doesn’t happen on its own. I discussed in the previous chapter that worship involves both the head and the heart, and when the two are actively engaged in worship, a proper atmosphere has been created for reflection and transformation. I heard somebody sing, “When I look back over my life, and I think things over, I can truly say that I’ve been blessed...I’ve got a testimony.” Christian testimonies are created only when we have experienced the wonder working power of God in our lives. The testimonies of the past, present and those of the future serve as an ever-growing archive of theological reflections that are a constant reminder that God is still God, and beside Him there is no other.

²⁷ *Sing to the Lord*, Hymn Number 30, “Sing to the Lord” (Kansas City, Missouri: Lillenas Publishing Co., 1993).

CHAPTER 9: ON THE MATTER OF COMPETENCY

The Doctor of Ministry is a professional degree program designed to enhance both the knowledge and practice of ministry. One goal of the program is to improve the ministerial competency of the individual candidate. To this end it is important for the Site Team to help a candidate identify areas of both strength and weaknesses.

The primary focus of this assessment instrument is on the candidate's role and performance in the local ministerial setting. The task for the Team and Candidate together is to agree upon two three competency areas that are to be developed through the Demonstration Project.

Upon several meetings with my Site Team, two areas of competency were identified that needed to be developed. First, under the heading “**Ecumenist**,” I was told that I needed to develop an “ability to provide structured opportunities for interdenominational and/or interfaith worship, education, and action.” In the beginning I wondered how they came to this conclusion. Then I remembered that before I arrived at the Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly there was virtually nothing happening in the way of interdenominational worship or education. This “problem” was not difficult to address. When I came to BPA I decided to take things slowly. This was my first pastorate and their first female Pastor. As a matter of fact, this was the first Pastor that they have had in 29 years. After taking the necessary time to acclimate myself to my new surroundings, I immediately sensed a need to broaden the boundaries of this congregation. The worship

experience had become stale, and except for a few Sunday School children, there was nothing in the way of education either. I believe it was through the workshops, seminars, and focus groups that were held at the church that that I was able to not only educate the congregation but to foster dialogue among this Christian community. In response to this directive, I invited many other churches from different denominations, and I invited several personal friends. Many new relationships were established among the congregation and clergy alike. My members made new friends and so did I. These new friendships made way for other activities in my church setting that brought me in direct contact with people who had new ideas and were eager to see these ideas manifested within the context of our church setting.

I remember our Harvest service at the end of September 2006. I used this as a wonderful opportunity to communicate the need for diversity in our church and in our community. The Bible says in Matthew 9:37, “The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few.” I met with my congregation ahead of time and explained to them the need for us to create a welcoming environment for the visitors that would be coming. They didn’t often have many outsiders coming and so my invitations and subsequent acceptances from other churches was something new to them. But it had to begin with me. I could not depend on others to create this new and improved environment; it had to start with a renewing of my mind.

Secondly, under the heading of “**Administrator**,” I was told to develop “the ability to work to realize the mission of the whole through the various tasks that form its parts.” When I asked my Site Team to explain what they meant by this, they seemed reluctant to share their feelings. I must confess that I was not prepared for what was

coming. One of them told me “Rev., you may not realize this, but you always seem to want to do everything by yourself. While it is true that you delegate when necessary, you always have to go back and check on whether or not they are doing things the way you want them to be done. You check on people so much that we believe that oftentimes you lose sight of the end result. In other words you don’t seem to realize that in order for a project or any task to be successful, it takes more than YOU. Everybody has to work together.”

When we were discussing the competency results in class, I mentioned that I didn’t know the Site Team knew me that well. I didn’t even know they watched me that much. I thought to myself, “am I that bad?” And so I had to take a step back, a step that I now believe was way overdue. I began to ask myself some probing questions, one of which was, “Why do I act this way?” And then I began to think about how accustomed I had become to doing everything by myself. Somewhere along the line I set myself up to believe that if I don’t have major “hands on” involvement, something was bound to go wrong. I was raised as an only child who was taught to always strive for excellence. I was and still am a person who wants everything done “right” and “right away.” In my quest to always achieve this, I seemed to have developed a propensity to exclude others in many of my endeavors in my personal life and in ministry. I remember someone calling me “the Lone Ranger” once, and didn’t get it at the time. I get it now.

Over the course of the last 15 months, I have made it my personal commitment to not only to involve others in my work of ministry, but also to leave them alone. Truth be told, things seem to work out better in the long run because things are not as stressful and

people are better able to use their gifts and talents. Somebody said there is less of a need to perform because I'm not always checking up on them.

I have learned to relax and let the people in my church do their job. Occasionally, the need arises where I have to get involved, but for the most part they work well.

CHAPTER 10: THE THEOLOGY OF TRANSFORMATION

In Paul's second letter to the Corinthian church, chapter 3, verse 18 are recorded these words: "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." Paul's vision of his New Testament ministry was rich in the promise of a progressive transformation for believers.

Yet the Corinthians displayed less evidence of transformation than did other congregations. We know from Paul's first letter to them that their fellowship was marked by divisions, doctrinal disputes, by confusion over spiritual gifts, even by immorality that was winked at by the local body.

How could Paul maintain his confidence in this unspiritual church, despite all the evidence to the contrary? I believe the answer is given to us in 2 Cor. 4-5. Allow me to summarize:

Paul was not only a great evangelist and teacher; he was a master motivator. In 2 Corinthians we see Paul at his best, and discover how first of all the apostle maintained his own optimism, as well as the way he motivated others to a full commitment to his cause. Paul's confident reassurance of the Corinthian was not an attempt to manipulate them. It was not just a motivational technique. Instead, what Paul was doing was sharing with these uncertain and ashamed believers what he really thought about them. Expressions of confidence, if honest, do motivate. But such expressions cannot initially be based on others' past performance. If our hope for ourselves and for others is based on

performance, there is bound to be a growing sense of discouragement and ultimately, the loss of hope.

This is a trap that parents often fall into with their children. Time after time they instruct and encourage or request. And time after time the child fails to respond, or “forgets” or simply ignores. He doesn’t do his homework. She forgets to make her bed. The children keep on resisting correction. Before long, a parent’s confidence is worn down. Before long the parent *expects* the child to disappoint. And the child, sensing the parent’s attitude, begins to expect to fail.

It was important for me to learn Paul’s secret, the secret of maintaining one’s own confidence, and thus being able to build confidence and hope – and motivation to change – into others’ lives. What was Paul’s secret?

“We do not lose heart.” (2 Cor. 4) Paul was deeply aware that he had been entrusted with his ministry by God. That gave him confidence. But Paul also laid down an important principle which was at the core of his confidence. Outwardly Paul admitted deterioration: we are “wasting away”. But inwardly Paul experienced a daily renewal. As a result Paul said, “We fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” (v. 18) What Paul said is that *anything* that exists in this world of time and space is subject to change. Children grow up. Job descriptions change. Buildings decay. Civilizations fall. Anything that we can see is by its very nature subject to change.

This is true of those children of ours who can’t remember to make their beds – and of the Corinthians (and my church family) who couldn’t seem to get beyond disputes and arguments. If what troubles us is a behavior that we can see, then we need to

remember that it is temporary. It will change, by the very nature of things in this world of change. How foolish it is, then, to become discouraged and give up, even if behavior that bothers us persists for months (as in my case with my church family) or years. We need to remember, with Paul, that what we see can and does change.

Stephen Covey says in his book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, “No one can persuade another to change. Each of us guards a gate of change that can only be opened from the inside. We cannot open the gate of another, either by argument or by emotional appeal.”²⁸

When I first embarked upon this journey, I was a new Pastor who came to the Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly with an enormous amount of experience. I had served as the Associate Pastor at another church for seven years, and prior to that had served in many leadership capacities at another church. Looking back over my Christian life, I often wonder where the time has gone, and how did I manage to involve myself with so much over the years. I was a Girl Scout leader, minister to the sick and shut-in, General Chairperson to the Women’s Day Committee, minister to women. I established a Women’s Fellowship, taught Bible Study and the list goes on and on.

I foolishly believed that when I came to the Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly - a church that was almost dead on the vine – that changes would come easy. I also thought that I could change folk by way of gentle persuasion and emotional appeal. After all, I figured that after so many years of being a part of a worship service that was boring, dysfunctional and insipid, people would be eager for something new, improved, and fresh.

²⁸ Steven Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (New York, New York: Free Press, a Division of Simon and Schuster, 1989), 60, 61.

I walked in the door ready to instruct (remember I had a LOT of prior experience!), encourage and make some requests. But just like the children that I described in the previous paragraphs, **in the beginning** I was met with outward enthusiasm, but inward resistance. What I thought was a thirst for change was actually a desire on the congregation's part to recycle what was already in place.

I tried to introduce a new Order of Worship. That never worked. My congregation was so accustomed to having everything the same way and in the same order, that it was even difficult for me to change the position of the intercessory prayer. One Sunday I tried to place that right after the opening hymn. There was so much grumbling and complaining that my innocent effort soon proved to be the basis for one of the worst Sunday services since I've been there.

Transformation at the Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly was slow and arduous, but nevertheless it came. Believe me, this congregation is not for the faint of heart! And so I had to draw back upon the Apostle Paul's secret. I could not let my confidence and hope erode. I had enough faith to believe that if I just stuck with it, things would change. I could not lose heart. Slowly but surely the Praise and Worship Team became a part of the service that people looked forward to instead of gazing at with minimal enthusiasm. With this new uplifting format came a livelier atmosphere. I began to notice that the people who usually came to church when it was half over were now in place by eleven o'clock. The music was greatly improved, attendance was up, and with the Lord being our Helper, the worship experience at the Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly began to change.

The people changed too. At one time there was such a spirit of hostility toward one another, and the church was clearly divided. I scheduled regular prayer meetings and

God answered our prayers. He began to change the *hearts* of the people. As is His custom, God worked from the inside out. He gave the people at the Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly more love for another, more patience with each other, and a greater respect for individual differences.

Transformation is more than a notion. It was time to do a reality check. Sunday morning service “looks” better because there are more people who are willing to participate in the various aspects of the worship service. I “see” more people who are actively involved. Sunday morning service “sounds” better too. Compared to a year ago, the enthusiasm and vibrancy of the music has greatly increased. People “seem” happier, and come to church whether it’s on Sunday or a weekday service willing to offer themselves wholly to the praise and worship of God. However, all that glitters is not necessarily gold. How do I know that they have been transformed by the changes that have been introduced? How do I know that their obvious euphoric state has not been brought on by abstract influences?

On Sunday March 11th and again on Sunday March 18th I decided to canvas a few members. I asked each of them, “Have you been transformed by the blended form of worship style that has been introduced, and if so, how?” I reminded each one that transformation means “a marked change for the better.”²⁹

Sister Melanie Singletary – “I too came from the African Methodist Church where the music was primarily traditional. We sang hymns and anthems and even when the choir tried to sing something contemporary it didn’t work. Since the changes in our church music, I find that both styles help me to worship God more completely. I’m not as “uptight” and dogmatic as I used to be. To tell you the truth, since allowing myself to be

²⁹ *The American Heritage Dictionary, Third Edition*, s.v. “Transformation.”

more open to different kinds of worship, it has helped me to be more understanding and accepting of other Christians and the way that they worship. How have I changed for the better? I have put away some of my prejudices toward other worship forms.”

Sister Ernestine Patrick – “The hardest part of holding on is letting go. I have been in this church for many years and I myself am amazed at how accustomed you can get to sitting in the same lifeless church service. This new music has changed me because I now eagerly anticipate meeting my God in the midst of this “new” worship style. Before, I would come to church and sing songs that had become stale, beat my tambourine as best I could, and then go home. I have a new found enthusiasm and connection with God that I have found through this new music style. I come to church excited and this same excitement is carried home with me after church and remains with me throughout the week. I even find myself humming the hymns one minute and some of the contemporary choruses the next. The same way our church service has been changed for the better, so have I.”

Sister Charmaine Curry – “We’ve been through a lot in the last couple of years, but since this new blended worship style began, there has been a natural progression towards increased spirituality within the church members and within me. This new music picks me up and takes me to a place that I would not have believed possible. Why? Because the traditional hymns were the only kind of music that was offered to us and for some reason, traditional always reminds one of where you came from. The contemporary music makes me look to the future with hope. I am just glad that I am still alive to experience such wonderful changes in our church and in me as well.”

Master Colton Grimes (13 yrs. old) “I can’t really describe it. All I know is that church is not as boring and the music makes me want to know more about God. I say my prayers more and when I listen to some of the words in the songs, I try to remember some of them when I feel down.”

Some changes happened within me as well. Again and again I had to remind myself that God called me to this ministry and even if I wanted to, I would not abandon my assignment. It was, and still is my faith in God that gives me confidence in the face of some failures, strength in the face of weakness, and wisdom in the face of uncertainty. I have learned that changes don’t happen on my schedule but on God’s schedule. I have learned that there are many parts to a whole and the “parts” cannot be ignored. I have learned that I must be grateful AND satisfied with a little until God brings the increase. I’m a lot more patient now. I’m a little older too! With my new found patience and through the grace of God I continue to put one foot in front of the other and move forward.

My personal transformation speaks to the sovereignty of God in that it is through His power that I am more energized than ever as I move forward. In the beginning I wasn’t sure how my good intentions would be received. I worried more about keeping people happy as opposed to doing what I believed God called me to do. Confidence has now taken the place of anxiety and it is through this project that I know that I can have a vision that encompasses uncharted territory and know that I have the tools to get it done.

My people skills have greatly improved. The interaction and dialogue that occurred during the interviews and workshops have given me a wider look into the lives of people and the external and internal influences that govern their lives. As a result, I am

a more compassionate person and am better able to understand that we are all in fellowship together for the sole purpose of helping one another and worshipping God. My greatest competency issue was that I have a propensity to always work alone and to make decisions by myself. This Demonstration project, by virtue of the research that had to be done, the dialogue that was necessary, and the many prayers prayed seeking guidance from God, has enabled me so see one of my greatest faults and want to do something about it.

As opposed to being a disconnected link, I am blessed to find myself **wanting** to be a part of the “fence” called the Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly. I enjoy being with people more often, and more importantly, I am more concerned and involved with the care of others. When we come together for worship, I feel myself as being more connected with the congregation. My worship is not only individual, but somehow, I am identifying more with the spirit of the people and therefore my worship has become fuller and more satisfying.

This Demonstration project has also enhanced my leadership skills. One of the most important elements of leadership is checking to make sure that somebody is following you. I look behind me more often now. I make sure that I am leading everybody, not just those who choose to come along for the ride.

Transformation as taught me that there is a high price to pay and sacrifices to be made. I have become progressively more resilient as God gives me more responsibility and more of His people to shepherd and care for. This price includes the time taken away from family and friends in order that I could see to the business of the church. I had

always been taught that family comes first. But when you have been given an assignment by God, sometimes those who are the most important you get placed on the back burner.

My mother, who suffers from the early stages of Alzheimer's disease, has seen a lot less of me, and consequently I have had to monitor her health by phone instead of the personal visits that she and I enjoyed everyday. My daughter, who is expecting her first baby, has had to play "catch me if you can" because my time is at a premium and therefore it is difficult for us to share this very important time in her life with me. She and I want to talk about impending motherhood and grandmotherhood, but most times I find myself talking about the next project to be done at the church or airing my annoyances concerning one issue or another.

Transformation to me means there is going to be a certain amount of stretching on my part and stretching is almost always painful. During the initial stages of the worship style changes, on most Sundays I found myself trying to massage the doubters into sharing my vision concerning the service and the other times battling some of my critics. It was interesting to note that my critics were the ones that would complain "at home" that they are not comfortable with some of the changes, yet they would go to other churches and sit and marvel about the beauty of the sanctuary, the impressive band, and the many choirs and Praise Teams that were in place. The duplicitous mindsets annoyed me. I wondered how people could enjoy worship a certain way at one church and not like or want a similar format at their own church. I began to see that there was more going on with them that met the eye.

Many people seemed to be upset with some of the changes, yet as I took the time to talk to them, I found that their anger was rooted in personal frustrations. Some had

recently lost a job, some were still looking for a job after several months, and some were having severe problems at home. As I listened to them, I truly began to understand their pain. They were looking to their Pastor for comfort and on some level wanted me to refrain from changing anything at church that was familiar.

As a result of time spent with them and my added sensitivity to their needs, we were not able to do several things. I was planning a “Worship Jam” with the new Praise and Worship Team but I postponed it because I didn’t think folk were ready for it. I was also planning a Youth Summit where young people from my church and others would come together to talk about some of the challenges of being a “youth for Christ,” but I simply didn’t have the time or the energy. I had to **give up** a lot of what I wanted and **give in** to other’s emotions, desires, and sometimes their idiosyncratic behavior.

Finally, transformation for me means that one sometimes has to “go with the flow.” As a pastor who has made some changes and in the process of making more, I have resigned myself to the increased flexibility that has made the stretching a little bit more comfortable.

I am accustomed to seizing the moments as they occur to spend time with family and friends. I still do that. The difference now is that I seize more moments to care for myself, to pray, and to meditate.

I believe that, along with me, many people in the Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly, like Paul, did not lose hope. Although it was hard sometimes, most of us held on to our confidence in God, knowing that He is the master of bringing about changes in all things. We stopped looking at what could be seen, and fixed our eyes on the Author and Finisher of our faith.

CHAPTER 11: DEMONSTRATION PROJECT RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

Statement of the Problem:

There has been some debate as to whether contemporary music can be used in place of, or in addition to the traditional hymn. In order to draw younger members and maintain the established traditions of worship for long time churchgoers, can the service itself be tailored to accommodate both styles of worship and still be effective and meaningful to those of varying ages, backgrounds and expectations? How can this combination of worship style be achieved so that everyone gets what he or she specifically needs from the worship experience? In attempting to merge these styles can both types of worshipers and the service itself be transformed, and specifically in what ways?

Research Design:

The debate over what style of music should be used in worship is going to be one of the major points of conflict in the local church and the church at large.

My research design was comprised of interviewing several Pastors and Bishops to find out what worship design they were using in their church and if the current form was working. As stated in my proposal, this demonstration project would not be germane to the Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly. At the outset I stated that some of my colleagues and lay persons alike share an interest in exploring the multifaceted layers of worship; I therefore attempted to include broad representation and avoid random sampling of

interviewees. I talked to persons that I had access to who I knew would speak frankly. I interviewed clergy from different denominations. For example:

Reverend Dr. Keith Burnett – Church of the Pilgrim Holiness (Pentecostal)

Reverend Randy L. Ware – Greater Mt Pleasant Baptist Church (Baptist)

Bishop Brian C. Greene – Bishop, Assemblies of God

I attempted to collect information from church attendees about their perception of the worship experience with a special focus on music styles in particular to understand the components of the worship experience such as music and other liturgical elements. Specific attention was given to understanding traditional vs. contemporary music, the role church leadership plays in the worship experience, interviewing Bishops from different denominations, collecting data from students entering ministry and feedback from congregants.

The interest in this project was stimulated by my experience as Pastor. Therefore, I used my church setting as a laboratory to examine the issues, develop surveys, and to develop an approach for gathering information.

Having served as Associate Pastor at Macedonia AME Church for 7 years, I decided to compare perspectives between Macedonia and the Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly. I also decided to look at this concept of contemporary music vs. traditional through the perspective of students who are entering the ministry.

I also conducted several workshops and held an Open Forum at the Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly and at other churches. The difference between the workshops and the open forum is that ultimately the workshop focused on music, but the forum focused on the individual. In other words, the workshops focused on the external elements of

worship, whereas the forum focused on the internal preparedness of one's ability to worship "in spirit and in truth."

One of the workshops entitled "God Is Looking for You" was held at the Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly. Some of the questions that were discussed were:

"What is your definition of worship?"

"What do you think is supposed to happen in the context of the worship service?"

"What is the difference between worship, praise, and devotions?" (See Chapter "Easier Said Than Done.")

In addition to these questions and others, we examined "Eleven Truths about Lifestyle Worship" (Appendix 3). I assigned a "truth" to eleven different people and asked them to make a presentation on the material provided. (See Chapter "Easier Said Than Done.")

My research also involved teaching. In December 2005, I was invited to teach Worship at the Ministerial Training Institute of the First Episcopal District of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. There were many general discussions around the topic and scheduled assignments resulted in a plethora of information. (See "Outside of My World" and Appendix 5.)

Focus groups were also conducted. It was important for me to gather information from congregations not only outside of Brooklyn but also outside of New York . I contacted friends and colleagues in Queens, the Bronx, New Jersey and Massachusetts. I found out that worship styles sometimes greatly differ in style not only from Borough to Borough, but also from state to state. Questions posed to those who participated were:

"What are the current streams of worship at **your** church?"

“How does each form of worship contribute to the overall service?”

“How do you think God views contemporary music?” (Appendix 10)

Oftentimes it helps to “see” progress and change than it is to read about it. My final method of research involved a video diary. An important element of this Demonstration Project was to show the gradual changes in the workshop experience at the Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly and to capture the actual workshops and the various contributions and opinions from the participants as it actually happened.

Beginning on Christmas day 2005, I began to videotape the worship service at BPA. This video shows what the worship experience was like when I began pastoring and shows how slow but steady progress was made over time. We progressed from having no one to play the organ to a 15 member Praise and Worship Team. The video also captures the workshop “God Is Looking for You” (See “Easier Said Than Done and Appendix 2.) In this video one is able to gain a glimpse of the energy that is generated when the topic of worship is examined beyond the Sunday morning church service.

In addition to watching the small but steady progress of the worship service and the transformation that takes place at the church, I also interviewed the new minister of music from Georgia and asked him about his perspectives on playing for a Caribbean church.

Data was also collected from television programs and DVD’s.

Research Findings and Results:

After collecting data from interviews, workshops, focus groups, panel discussions and classroom sessions, I collated and analyzed this material for themes and patterns. I read all data and marked them when I recognized areas of commonalities and differences.

Looking at the responses of the participants taken from the interviews, I examined this data for the purpose of comparative analysis.

I conducted 15 surveys, 10 focus groups, interviewed 10 Pastors, one Bishop, attended 3 conferences (one in Massachusetts) and engaged in many conversations with members of several churches.

I read all narratives collected from students and focus groups and grouped them by similarities and perspectives.

My findings and results were similar in many ways. In speaking to Pastors from different churches, and as I reviewed the data collected from the workshops and focus groups, most all have had conversations with the younger members of the church, the older members, as well as some of the new members. They expressed that the addition of the contemporary music style to the worship service has made their experience more spiritual, and in some way had motivated them to attend and participate in services with more consistency. They found an increased interest in the service itself and noted that the contemporary sound facilitated for them the presence of the Holy Spirit in a more real way than they had previously experienced with traditional hymns that were being sung. They spoke about the traditional songs with terms such as “boring,” “unmoving,” and “old style” – mentioning that a good portion of them had been written in centuries past. The modern style of contemporary gospel music is more complex in melody, in most cases containing four- part harmony and incorporating modern instruments like guitars and keyboards, as well as the basic organ that traditionalists are accustomed to.

Most agreed that the transformation of the service from the strictly traditional hymns to a mixture of both musical styles has been an enhancement for younger

parishioners, yet at the same time has shown the older worshippers the traditions and established forms of worship cannot be replaced and are essentially the foundation for contemporary worship.

Additional research results showed that all musical genres are based on, or are developed as a result of, another style. Without the traditional, the contemporary as we know it could not be possible. Like traditional hymns, which preceded contemporary gospel music, it is a continuation of the significant elements of the worship experience. It invokes powerful psychological reaction in the listener, as is its intent.

These findings were reinforced when speaking with members of other churches like Bridge Street AWME Church, Community Worship Center, Macedonia AME Church and others. These churches have incorporated both styles into their worship services for many years. Members state that the services have a broader appeal and attract both young and old alike, both of whom enjoy and accept both styles equally.

Additionally, when the traditional hymns are sung these churches have added modern instruments to the organ thereby giving the hymns a modern arrangement. Although they may follow the traditional melody, they are “instrument enhanced” or jazzed up a bit to have more of a musical appeal. The contemporary songs are also infused with the traditional pipe or Hammond organs to give them more of an “old time” feel.

The blending of the instruments clearly can have mass appeal to all worshippers and is that not the point - to bring the gospel to all church members and additionally, appealing to the non-church audience while honoring the pioneers of old.

Summary:

One of the most important questions that I have asked Pastors, leaders, focus group and workshop participants, as well as myself is, “Does the WHOLE church support the service?” Many of the questions that I asked my congregation and the questions posed in all of the group settings sometimes created tension because some of the questions were never directly asked by anyone else. They were not nearly so difficult, however, as what can happen in churches when new things are started without the agreement of the vast majority of members and all leaders. We all agreed that the whole congregation needs time to buy into the new service. We can’t give in to the temptation to say, “They’re old (or whatever they are), and they don’t get it, so forget them!”

My observations and the general consensus of my research agree that you may not have absolutely everyone on board with your vision, but you want as many on board as possible at the outset. The entire transformation process involves giving people a chance to ask questions and to learn about the new thing that is being introduced. Some of the most supportive folks I’ve worked with have been those who said, “I don’t quite get this new music **yet**, but I understand that young people (and some of the older people, too) want to worship that way, and I will support you in any way that I can.” In one of the churches that I canvassed, two nonagenarians were the first to arrive and sat in the front row of the first transitional service.

My research also showed that you have to give people a chance to grasp what you’re doing and become your allies in ministry. You must explain the need, identify the people in the worship team group, and meet with people individually and in groups. In

other words, do whatever you can in order to interpret how God is leading you, and invite people into partnership.

I believe that if you start by first assessing the need for specific change and finding out if the church supports your efforts (even if only in part), progress will be made. You don't have to have all of the answers going in, but you do need to have a sense of the questions and some of the answers to get started. You need a beginning point, a clear vision of where you're trying to go (I had no musician at all in the beginning and clearly had a vision for a Praise and Worship Team as a starting point for change in the music), and an idea of how you'll get there. You might find out in the first six months that on some counts you were wrong. That's okay. If you start out with a vision and people that will continue to work with you and share your vision, progress will come as you hone and make the necessary adjustments as you go

CONCLUSION

What Matters Most – God at the Center of Worship

Worship is the most important activity in which we engage as Christians. We worship God in order to serve God. In the early sixties, during the civil rights movement, some northern White students who went south to join the marches and the protests could not understand why Black people gathered first in rural frame churches on hot summer nights, using fans donated by the local undertaker, where they sang and prayed and testified and preached and then marched.

They did not understand that it was through worship and praise that Black people were given power, courage, fortitude and faith. It was worship that empowered God's dispossessed and gave them strength for the perilous journey. It was the assurance of divine presence that fueled the fire of social justice. What we do in the church building has a direct relationship to what we do outside the church building. Work without worship becomes nothing more than a philanthropic gesture. The church is more than a social agency; it is more than a political action club for the betterment of the human race. As a matter of fact, the church is not the building at all. The church is made up of the "people of God" who assemble themselves together for the sole purpose of worship.

The first issue in worship is our **focus** – *whom* we worship. When we read the Bible we should become riveted on the fact that there is a central character woven throughout the pages that lets us know that God is that main character who has control of

all that takes place. The psalms are all about a mighty and wondrous God and how powerful that God is. The psalmists' candor and freedom, their awe and amazement, the forthrightness of their complaints and the joyfulness of their praise all work together to show the almighty, eternal, omnipotent Creator being approached with warmth, humility, happiness, abandonment and reverence. In each psalm, we see a human being boldly entering God's presence, understanding that He is welcomed there. And the worshipper is clearly active, not merely pensive. He is singing, shouting, bowing, kneeling, lifting hands and dancing with head bowed and head upraised, silent one minute and exuberant the next! Worship that has found the throne-room of the living God cannot be anything but alive. Transcending intellectual analysis, it overflows with joy as the human heart comes in contact with its Creator and Redeemer. This is the very core of African American worship. Intellect has nothing to do with it. We as African Americans will always reach back to remember what God has done for us and it is the anchor of our memories that reminds us that the faith that worked in the past is the very faith that will keep on working in the midst of our worship experiences.

The second issue in worship is its **purpose** – *why* we worship. For some, this overlaps the issue of focus already discussed. *Why?* is answered with "Because God is worthy of our worship," and of course this is true. But let us deal with the reason God Himself has called us to worship and has given us the privilege of worshipping Him. His plan for worship was concisely communicated when He commanded the Tabernacle to be built, saying, "And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them." (Exod. 25:8)

His designed purpose for worship is still the same. Worship is both the means by which we may enter the presence of God and the means by which He is welcomed into the midst of our world. The teaching of Jesus notes this, calling for worship in prayer: “Our Father which is in Heaven, hallowed (holy) be thy name.” (Matt 6:9) His prayer then immediately proceeds to invite God into our present circumstances: “Thy kingdom come (its power and glory). Thy will be done on earth (where my world needs Your presence and power) as it is in heaven (an invasion of the heavenly is needed where I live)” (v. 10).

The discipline of worship calls each of us to understand the power of praise: Worship is a means of invoking the presence of God’s throne in the joy, pain, hurt or hope of my present moment. The discipline of worship is part of a life that expands in knowing God, His power and His blessing. This discipline finds many expressions, from private praise to worshipping with the assembly, from singing with gladness to giving shouts of praise.

Worship is always a personal experience. Worship in the African American experience is no different. But oftentimes there are problems with our worship regardless of the denomination. We come looking for something that may or may not have anything to do with God. Too often we show up in church with the “what’s in it for me” mindset. Some people choose a church the same way they buy a car – they will go to the dealer who will give them the best deal. Too often a church is selected because it makes *me* feel important, it recognizes *me* as a person, the preacher knows *my* name, and the music makes *me* feel good. By the time we are finished, the nature of our religious experience is defined by “me.” If the Spirit does not touch me, it’s because the Spirit was not there.

If the sermon does not move me, it's because the sermon was bad.

Of course all of this is not totally a negative. The worship service should meet our needs. But the true nature of worship is not me-centered but God centered. The real question is, who is the main attraction? Who is the subject of every song and every sermon? Who is the reason around whom we gather? And whose name is to be lifted up?

It is not just a question of whether or not I am satisfied, but whether or not God is satisfied. Not only are we God's audience; in worship, God becomes our audience. Some people say that there really is no need to pray for the Holy Spirit to show up because the Lord is already in His house. I don't necessarily agree with that. I am of the belief that a proper atmosphere must be set in order for a true worship experience to take place. The most dangerous hindrances to true worship are the distractions that seem to consume our attention during the church service. Some people never hear the song because they are hung up on who is singing it. They never hear the sermon because they are too busy analyzing the messenger instead of hearing the message. They sit like amateur psychologists trying to read the preacher's message. So if the preacher talks too much about trouble, it must be because he or she is in trouble. If he/she talks about the importance of remaining faithful in marriage, he/she must be having marital difficulties that have to do with infidelity. True worship demands that God and God alone be glorified.

In the Baptist tradition, the focus of the service is the proclamation of the Word of God through the weekly sermon. The sermon is surrounded by periods of musical worship led by a song leader, choir or band. Musical style varies between hymns and contemporary Christian music with many churches choosing a blend of the two. The

choice of music style is often correlated to the predominant age of the members, with older congregants preferring traditional hymns played with piano and/or organ and featuring a choir. Younger congregants prefer contemporary music with modern instruments and no choir. Larger churches may have a full orchestra along with the choir, and may also have multiple services each Sunday, each with a different worship style. Some fundamentalist Baptists will only sing hymns written between the 1700's and the 1950's and generally oppose the use of drums and/or electric guitar in their services because they associate those instruments with rock music.

In Jamaica, the use of Gospel Reggae is accepted because of the ethnicity of the music and its power to attract people. The same is true in the Baptist tradition in the United States. Some Baptist churches are comprised of only people from the Caribbean Islands, and most often they prefer a worship experience that not only caters to their culture but also to the various age groups. This mixture more often than not is difficult to accomplish. The younger generation is seldom tolerant of the "traditional" form of worship that the older members prefer. They feel that the hymn book is not necessary and that the praise and worship team can fully handle the responsibility of bringing the congregation to a joyful worship experience.

The older members can barely hide their shock and displeasure at what the praise and worship team is offering. This shock and accompanying displeasure has a tendency to have a domino effect. The older members perch themselves in a "wait and see" position. They wait to see if this new form of worship is here to stay or is this something that is only being tried out. Once the word gets out that a permanent change is being made, some adapt, some continue to complain, and some even leave the church in search

of a place of worship that resembles their original comfort zone. Or the congregation as a whole may be predisposed to one or the other style of worship, and collectively by their silence or their utterances indicates approval or disapproval of what is taking place.

Cheryl J. Sanders states in her article *African-American Worship in the Pentecostal and Holiness Movements*, “Worship in the Pentecostal tradition involves song, speech, dance, and other ways of knowing God. This tradition thrives on the integration of aesthetics (cultural authenticity), ethics (implementation of Christian norms), and epistemology (ways of knowing) in its characteristic verbal and bodily articulations of praise. Worship practices and experiences are continually interrogated with reference to specific aesthetic expectations and ethical standards. When the soloist or instrumentalist has pushed the congregation to the brink of ecstasy with an inspired performance, when the preacher has brought the sermon to a dramatic climax, when the gatekeepers of pulpit and pew usher the people through the experience of the shout, it is understood as the ‘witness of the Spirit’, the much sought-after manifestation of the Holy Spirit. The underlying ethical and theological context of Holiness-Pentecostal worship is the corporate testimony of being ‘saved, sanctified, and filled with the Holy Ghost.’”³⁰ It is in this corporate testimony that people who worship in the Pentecostal tradition find their true connection with God. The Bible states in John 4:23 “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.” Pentecostal people want to make sure that they are among the ones who the Father finds when He seeks!

³⁰ Cheryl J. Sanders, “African-American Worship in the Pentecostal and Holiness Movements,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 32 (fall 1997), http://wesley.nnu.edu/wesleyan_theology/theojrnl/31-35/32-2-6.htm (accessed 22 March 2007).

The African American Pentecostal church is certainly known for its enthusiastic singing and response, as worship finds expression across a broad range of sacred musical forms. The singing of songs and hymns represents a major component of congregational involvement in the worship experience. The sung repertoire of the tradition includes classical anthems, hymns, gospel songs, spirituals, shouts, and spontaneous a cappella renditions of choruses.

The organ is the instrument of choice for the planned and improvisational style of worship music in many churches, regardless of the denomination. The organ shapes the mood and expresses the energy of the songs, speech, and dance. The organ takes the lead in providing the rhythmic and tonal texture of the worship experience, and it is the principle instrument used to accompany the preacher while he/she is preaching. In the hands of a skilled and accomplished musician there is no substitution for the spiritual presence that the organ brings. Worship in the African American tradition depends heavily on the atmosphere that emerges when the organ is being played. Whether the style is traditional or contemporary, the organ for most people is the lifeblood of the experience. The drums can beat, the horns can be blowing, the cymbals clanging, the songs can be sung, and the liturgical dancers can be in fine form, but if the organ remains mute, for some people a major component of true worship is absent.

Thus worship has fixed and fluid forms, rehearsed and unrehearsed, scripted and improvised, prepared and spontaneous. To make matters more complex, it is clear that some forms and events in worship reflect both fixed and fluid elements at the same time.

Worship is more than music. Worship also includes prayer, scripture reading and preaching. Prayer is an individual or collective appeal to God, which includes praise,

thanksgiving, confessions, and various petitions. As is the case with music, it is difficult to fix one point in the outline of worship where prayer occurs, because it typically is done repeatedly throughout the service. Prayers are seldom read or recited from a printed source, with the exception of the Lord's Prayer, which the worshippers may recite or chant from memory.

Scripture reading is another indispensable element in African American worship. One or more texts may be read near the beginning of the service, or shortly before the sermon is preached. The Scriptures can be individually read from the pulpit, or read responsively by minister and congregation. The Bible is accorded the highest respect and regard in these churches, and in some cases there are special ritual procedures for transporting and handling the particular Bible which is used for the readings.

Preaching is a climactic event in the African American worship experience because it is believed that the preacher actually speaks for God. Often the sermons are performed in the sense that the basic message and content are amplified through chants, moans, dancing, and other ecstatic behaviors. Preaching is more than the simple verbal communication of the gospel of Jesus Christ based on some scriptural text; it involves emotion, physical movement, various modulations of the preacher's voice, and is designed to bring the worshipping community into some form of climactic expression such as shouting, tears, praise, and repentance.

In our modern day worship experience, room must be left for a brief discussion about the place that liturgical dancing has in the African American church. It may have taken a while, but liturgical dancing has certainly become an expected form of worship in our churches. This dance includes the choreographed choir processions on Sunday and at

special worship services and a whole host of bodily gestures by the “dance team” which usually is known by a special name. The dance is choreographed to a particular segment of contemporary music and the members move their bodies in synch to the rhythms and beats. The movements usually coincide with the message of the lyrics and so, if the song talks about giving God praise, arms are usually outstretched and the head is tilted upward. If the song is talking about sorrow, the body is usually formed into a bowing position with arms and hands pointed downward.

Finally, in any worship experience there is usually a benediction which I believe is an integral part of the service. The benediction is a prayer or formula of blessing that signals that the worship experience has ended. It may include a final exhortation or commission to the worshippers to implement or emphasize some particular truth or principle that has been preached. The minister who offers the benediction may raise both hands, and in some cases the worshippers also raise their hands while receiving the benediction. In my opinion, the benediction not only signals the end of the service, it also “seals” the worship experience. I believe it is a way of letting people know that a stamp of approval has been given by God, and it adds more meaning to the expression “go in peace”.

In my Proposal I stated that “There is a debate going on in the black church that pits traditional worship against contemporary worship styles. Those who argue in favor of traditional worship maintain that some liturgical “basics” are non-negotiable. Worship must include hymns and other liturgical elements, and must hold fast to the already established and uniformly accepted order of worship. Conversely, those who argue in favor of contemporary worship maintain that the church must be able to serve individuals

on every level of their need. These needs include making room for substituting the traditional hymns for “praise and worship” songs, and restructuring the worship experience so that it displays a more contemporary style.

This Demonstration project has shown that “You Can Have It Both Ways”, but God must be at the center of all of our worship. The order of service in our churches is changing, the music is changing and the faces of our congregations are changing. With these changes come varying forms of worship styles. Through the interviews, workshops, and focus groups, I have shown that room is already being made for everybody to feel comfortable within the worship setting. Across the board Pastors and church leaders are raising the bar in their congregations to accommodate the die-hard traditionalists and those who prefer a more contemporary style.

As I reflect on what has happened since I began this project, it is important for me to take a step back and look at my congregation through different lenses. We are not the same worshippers now that we were when I arrived. I came as one who sought to teach something new to a people whose spiritual ear was not ready to receive the sound of the gospel beat or the lyrics of the modern-day songs. I came to help them to depart from the notion that “worship” on Sunday morning is simply an 11AM to 2PM experience. I came to teach a Caribbean group of people that the ways that we worship can have variety and does not have to consistently follow the same form. I came to convince them that God is a God who understands and requires progression in His people as generations come and go.

I now find that as one who came to “teach” I am the one being taught that change does not always come quickly or systematically. I am being taught that the process of

transformation involves everyone who finds themselves in the vortex of the issue. Change comes whether we want it or not and always encompasses a broader perspective of our basic thoughts.

There is now a natural blend of traditional and contemporary worship in my church. We sing hymns and the format is combined with contemporary music such as gospel and “song” accompanied by liturgical dancing. Other times the worship leader will raise a few choruses of lines taken from contemporary songs. The Praise and Worship Team is still in place and determined to improve their performance.

Where are we headed to in the future? I pray that my vision for the Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly is realized. It is a vision that sees a full band in place on Sundays that includes organ, drums, synthesizer, bongos, tambourines, bass guitar and flute.

It is a vision that sees a talented and learned Minister of Music directing the many voices of the choir and Praise and Worship Team and with all of the pieces of the “orchestra” working together.

My vision includes seeing a church where people gather together on Sundays and other days of the week to worship God in such a way that little thought is given to the petty issues that separate God’s people in His house. In other words, folk wouldn’t be so reactive when their favorite leader, friend, or song is not in place. Rather, the congregation of the Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly would enter into the doors of the church with their focus on the one who should be worshipped – God.

Finally, in my description of the setting, I mentioned that there are many renovations that need to be done on the inside and outside of the church. My vision for

BPA also includes a complete renovation of the sanctuary, including a new ceiling, light fixtures, air conditioning, new carpeting and much more. I am currently in negotiations with contractors, electricians, and carpenters to begin this work in a few weeks. I believe that it is important for the church building to look the best that it can because as the congregants gather for worship it always helps (although it may not be necessary) for people to sit or stand in the midst of a beautiful tabernacle as they celebrate God and the beauty of His holiness.

I made many decisions in the process of this project. The most important ones involved the issue of music. When I arrived, the traditional hymns were already solidly in place. I believed that the congregation was ready for something new. On several of my previous visits (remember I grew up in this church and would occasionally visit), people would comment that they wished that the songs would change and that some of the young people that left would come back if the music was different.

I made the decision to put a Praise and Worship Team in place because it would offer the congregation the “new” that they previously alluded to. (See “Easier Said Than Done.”) I hired Chris Crenshaw (the musician) because I had no one else who was available, affordable, or qualified. The congregation wanted variety and so it was time to introduce gospel music to them. All of my decisions were received with minimal skepticism. The members of the Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly were willing to give me a chance to try new things and they were ready to receive it.

We at the Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly have come a long way. In the midst of looking back we also are looking ahead to the good things that God has prepared for us.

We MUST have it both ways without compromising the inerrant, unadulterated Word of God.

Everybody worships something. Whatever people center their live around is what they worship. Society worships success, money, beauty, even sex. The fact of the matter is, is there is only one person who is worthy of our worship. God is the one who created us, the one who protects us, the one who saved us and the one who blesses us. Most importantly, He sent his son to die for us so that through Him the world might be saved.

“Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.” (Jude v.24 ,25)

APPENDIX 1

Revised Order of Service

Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly
65 Classon Ave Brooklyn New York 11238
Rev. Denise A. Graves, Pastor

Revised Worship Service
Sunday November 27th, 2005
(inserted in bulletin)

Praise and Worship Team

Intercessory Prayer

Sis. Maralyn Sanders

Praise and Worship Team

The Preached Word

Rev. Denise A. Graves

Invitation to discipleship

Rev. Denise A. Graves

Announcements

Sis. Grace Pollard

Acknowledgement of visitors

Bro. Steven Lansbert

Offeratory

Praise and Worship Team

Parting remarks

Rev. Denise A. Graves

Benediction

Rev. Denise A. Graves

Appendix 1

APPENDIX 2

Seminar “God Is Looking for You” e

“GOD IS LOOKING FOR YOU”

A Seminar That Examines The Elements Of True Worship

The Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly Annual Women’s Conference

Saturday October 28th, 2006

Rev. Denise A. Graves Facilitator

“GOD IS LOOKING FOR YOU”

“But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.” John 4:23

1. The English word “worship” is derived from an Old English word “worthship” and constitutes those actions and attitudes that revere and honor the worthiness of the great God of heaven and earth. Therefore worship is God-centered and not man-centered.
2. What is the difference between worship/praise/devotions?
3. Within the worship experience there should always be a prophetic release. We as the Bride of Christ worship the Bridegroom and the Bridegroom should be able to meet us in the worship experience.
4. **Expressions of Christian worship.** Praising God/ Seeking God’s face in prayer/ Confession of sin/ Public reading of scripture/ The bringing of tithes and offerings/ Celebration of the sacraments.

God’s blessings for the true worshipper – When true worship takes place, God has many blessings in store for his people. **To be with us/ To bless/To impart an abundance of joy/ To encourage, strengthen, and comfort/ To lead into all truth.** (these are just a few)

BREAKOUT – What are some of the hindrances to true worship? And Why are they hindrances?

Worship through music. There is a debate going on in the black church that pits traditional worship against contemporary styles. Those who argue in favor of traditional worship maintain that some liturgical “basics” are non-negotiable. Worship must include hymns and other liturgical elements, and must hold fast to the already established and uniformly accepted order of service. Conversely, those who argue in favor of contemporary worship maintain that the church must be able to serve individuals on every level of their need. These needs include making room for substituting the traditional hymns for “praise and worship” songs, and restructuring the worship experience so that it displays a more contemporary style.

APPENDIX 3

Eleven Truths about Life Style Worship

INTRODUCTION TO WORSHIP

ELEVEN TRUTHS ABOUT LIFESTYLE WORSHIP

Truth #1: In its purest sense, worship is simply assigning worth or value to someone or something. Did you know the word worship actually comes from the Old English term “worthship” — that is, the state of having worth or value?

Truth #2: Worship always involves the glad and lavish giving of our devotion. Did you ever notice that when a person views someone or something as valuable, he or she eagerly devotes time, allegiance, affection, emotional energy, material resources, and even praise to that person or object? Think of rabid football fans or young couples truly in love and this point will be obvious.

Truth #3: Everyone in the world is a worshiper. That is to say, we each have relationships or objects in our lives that we consider valuable, and usually one person or object we view as having supreme worth. The question is never “Will a person worship?” but rather, “Who or what will he or she worship?”

Truth #4: Not everyone in the world worships God. This statement needs —or should need—no explanation! Just look around today at the countless things people focus their lives on.

Truth #5: What a person worships can be easily discovered. Want to know what a person values above all else? Look at his calendar or schedule book, listen to her conversation, observed how he spends his money, and you will have a good indication of what that person considers as having the highest worth in life.

Truth #6: The Bible declares God, our Creator and Redeemer, to be the One who deserves our worship. He alone is truly worthy. (See Revelation 4:6, 8-11 and 7: 9-12.)

Truth #7: God doesn’t need our worship. He is complete, independent, and self-sufficient. It has been this way from eternity past and will ever remain so. Perfect and lacking nothing, the Lord is in no way diminished if human creatures refuse or fail to worship. The heavens themselves shout the glory of God (Psalm 19:1), and He is surrounded by angelic beings who forever praise Him (Revelation 4:8). But God was complete even before the heavens were made or the angels existed!

Truth #8: Worshipping God leads to ultimate fulfillment; worshipping anything other than God is idolatry. The psalm writer boldly declared: “You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence and the pleasures of living with you forever” (Psalm 16:11). The theologian Augustine wisely observed: “You have made us for yourself, O God, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.”

Truth #9: Worship involves a sense of the presence of God. Whether It’s bowing down before God (Psalm 95:6), searching for the Lord (Psalm 105:3-4), trusting in His holy name (Psalm

33:20-21), dwelling in His house (Psalm 84), lifting hands (Psalm 134:2) or shouting to Him (Psalm 47:1). Worship always involves a recognition that God is near.

Truth #10: Worship should be active, emotional and enjoyable. The picture painted in Scripture is not of passive, sit-on-your-hand, dry, drab, going-through-the-motions worship. It is of enthusiastic celebration. The mood is one of gratitude and reverence, yet the worshipers seem genuinely excited (see 2 Samuel 6: -16).

Truth #11: Worship isn't merely something we do for ninety minutes in church on Sunday mornings. Worship is something we are. Worship isn't an activity. It is a lifestyle. Worship isn't just about singing and praying. Or reading the Bible. Or doing some other "religious" act. Worship is about life. And vice versa. When we finally understand that we have been created through God and for God (Colossians 1:16), when we truly grasp that God wants to receive glory in everything we do (1 Corinthians 10:31), then it begins to dawn on us that every place on earth can be a sanctuary and every act in life a sacrifice of praise. Name any responsibility, list every imaginable hobby, and that activity—no matter how mundane it may seem—can become a high and holy act. Even work. Even scrubbing the bathroom and walking the dog.

Do you agree or disagree with these truths. If you agree, go right on and worship the Lord.

Reference: *iWORSHIP DAILY DEVOTIONAL BIBLE*

Some quotes below from two of my favorite authors.

1. "Worship in spirit and truth involves the total human being – spirit, mind, emotions, and body." (Jack Hayford)
2. "The language of worship is found in prayer." (Jack Hayford)
3. "Worship changes the worshiper into the image of the One worshipped." (Jack Hayford)
4. "True worship is a gift that blesses rather than a chore that we wearily fulfill." (Jack Hayford)
5. "Worship is the highest elevation of the spirit, and yet the lowliest prostration of the soul." (Charles Spurgeon)
6. "God is to be praised with the voice, and the heart should go therewith in holy exultation." (Charles Spurgeon)

APPENDIX 4

Survey at Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly

Brooklyn Pentecostal Assembly

Survey Results

“What Do You Think?”

It has been approximately 15 months since our newly formed Praise and Worship Team has debuted. Reflecting upon what the worship experience was and what it has become, what are some of your thoughts?

As persons who have had the opportunity to be a part of the “team” and at other times part of the congregation, to what degree, if any, do you think progress has been made here at BPA?

Do you prefer hymns AND contemporary songs sung on Sunday, or do you prefer one type of music over the other? WHY?

What suggestions do you have that you think can improve our worship experience here at BPA?

What changes, if any, do you think need to be made NOW?

APPENDIX 5

Sample Student Responses to Worship and Development Assignment

Jeshua House of Worship

(Pastors Adu and Don French)

**695 Shepherd Boulevard
Brooklyn, New York 11208**



Sunday Worship Service

10:45 AM

*Where the Spirit of the Lord is
there is Liberty!*

ORDER OF WORSHIP

Opening Prayer

Worship in Song

Worship in Dance

Worship in The Preached Word

Worship in Prayer

Worship in Offering

Announcements and Welcome

Closing Prayer

APPENDIX 6

Order of Service, December 9, 2005

Rev. Denise Graves
Seminar

David Smalls
December 9, 2005

ORDER OF SERVICE

Worship and Praise
Introit
"Welcome Into This Place"

Processional
"We Come To Worship"

Meditation Time

Hymn of Praise
"Lord I Lift Your Name on High"

Lord, I lift your name on high. Lord, I love to sing your praises.
I'm so glad you're in my life. I'm so glad you came to save us.

You came from heaven to earth to show the way,
From earth to the cross, my debt you paid.
From the cross to the grave. From the grave to the sky.
Lord, I lift your name on high.

Invocation

Choral Response
"Blessings, Glory, and Honor"

Blessings, glory, and honor; Glory and honor to your name.
Glory and honor to your name; Lift up, the name of Jesus.
Lift up your heart to Him in praise. For there is power in the name.
His name is Jesus; Jesus, Jesus, Jesus my Lord; Jesus, Jesus, Jesus my Lord.

Scripture

Offering of Missions

Selection

Recognition of Visitors

Church Announcements

Pastor's Word
Giving of Tithes and Offerings
Offertory
Altar Call/Prayer
Sermonic Selection
Sermon
Invitation to Christian Discipleship
Prayer of Salvation
Benediction
Recessional

APPENDIX 7

Seminar, April 8, 2006

April 8, 2006
African Methodist Episcopal Institute
Seminar
Rev Dr Denise Graves - Instructor

Traditional or contemporary worship service is a topic that should be of concern to anyone who is in charge of preparing worship services. How many times have we heard from the older members of our congregations that they do not like the "new stuff" that we have introduced into our worship service? If we are totally traditionally orientated how many times do we hear the younger folks complaining about being bored? And in some cases it is almost impossible to get new persons, both young and old to join our congregation due to the staunch traditionalism practices of many churches today.

The dilemma is whether we go with the traditional, what has always been done in the worship service for years or do we go with the contemporary, the modern form of worship? I believe that we can neither have all of one type of services. As ministers called to lead others to salvation and increase the spiritual development of those who already profess Christ as their living Savior, we must incorporate both traditional and contemporary methods of worship into our services. As ministers we should be propelled to find innovative ways to have both types of worship service rolled into one if we are going to keep our current members involved and entice new members, both young and old,

to join our congregations and most importantly join and become an active part of the body of Christ.

This incorporation of both types of worship, traditional and contemporary must be done in a way that we do not lose the basic foundation of what we believe in as African Methodist Episcopal persons. Our basic doctrine, The Apostle's Creed and the twenty-five Articles of Religion, should not be compromise when we are intertwining traditional worship with contemporary worship service.

I believe education is the key. Our congregations, both young and old, need to understand that all types are worship, interpretive dance, praise dancing, mine and various types of music are all acceptable praises unto God as long as it is done in the right frame of mine and in the end God and God alone is glorified and get the praise and the body of Christ is edified.

Ultimately we have to know the voice of God and be lead by God's direction. We must recognize that our congregations are not the same as yesterday. If we are trying to revive many dying congregations, not only in the AME church but throughout the body of Christian believers, we must have a combination of both traditional and contemporary worship services that are pleasing to God.

APPENDIX 8

Traditional Versus Contemporary Worship: My View

TRADITIONAL VERSUS CONTEMPORARY WORSHIP MY VIEW

2 Chronicles 31:2-21 (King James Version)

And Hezekiah appointed the courses of the priests and the Levites after their courses, every man according to his service, the priests and Levites for burnt offerings and for peace offerings, to minister, and to give thanks, and to praise in the gates of the tents of the LORD.

In this scripture, Hezekiah has appointed leaders to direct the worship service. Their roles are to minister, to give thanks and to praise. In worship, these are the key elements of an effective service that provides the foundation for making the worship moment a life changing experience.

The review of traditional versus contemporary worship is dependent on understanding the ministerial focus for reaching various segments of the people of God. The two terms can be defined as the traditional church that has a worship format that has been passed down from previous generations. Conversely, contemporary worship is considered to be more responsive and reflective of current culture and mores.

Traditional worship can be classified as being passed down from generation to generation as the acceptable form of worship. It has the power of being broadly accepted and can be replicated over and over. In many cases it includes significant portions of the worship that is repeated week after week. The music is sung congregationally, which may severely impact quality. This worship experience tends to be more acceptable to the generations of grandparents and parents rather than children.

While there is repetition as a component of traditional worship, the importance and the context of the words are not automatically understood by later generations. Without an appreciation of the meaning, the service can become mundane and lethargic.

Even the leaders can lack zeal and energy as the same words are repeated without much conviction. But, this type of service can be effective if the engagement of the people directs the worship towards glorifying God.

For contemporary worship, the focus is on being more dynamic. There are fewer portions of the worship service that exactly the same week after week. Therefore, contemporary worship can be more energetic and flexible. Many of these services significantly reduce the dependence on written programs and hymnals. The music normally focuses on choirs and rarely includes congregational singing. Instead of participation through liturgy and hymns, the congregants focus on praise and worship. The music and the service are designed to allow the spirit of worship to be the guiding principle for the service. There are also more musical instruments including drums. This type of worship normally attract a younger audience.

Traditional worship versus contemporary worship is more accurately defined as the quality of the worship experience. Either form can have the impact of effectively ushering the worshipper into a closer relationship with God. It must be recognized that each component of worship is dependent on the other elements. Therefore, the nature of the format builds into the “character of the church.” It is the “character” which provides the criteria used to make a decision about joining a fellowship. The liturgical format and preaching are the most important elements and these are distinguished in the broad categories of traditional versus contemporary. I prefer contemporary worship because it is fluid and allows for praise to be the central focus. However, today’s contemporary worship is tomorrow’s traditional worship.

APPENDIX 9

Macedonia AME Church Survey

**Macedonia AME Church Survey
Saturday November 4th, 2006**

To the best of your ability answer the following questions. You will be asked to answer the same questions on Saturday December 2nd to determine whether or not your views have changed.

- 1. The English word "worship" is derived from an Old English word "worthship" and constitutes those actions and attitudes that revere and honor the worthiness of the great God of heaven and earth. Therefore worship is God-centered and not man-centered. What does worship mean to you?**
- 2. How do you feel during the worship experience at church?**
- 3. Should there be "preparation" for worship? Yes/No - Explain in detail your answer.**
- 4. What about the music? There are traditional styles of worship and contemporary styles of worship. Traditional is hymn book/structured "order of worship" etc. Contemporary is "praise and worship" team, power point displays of the songs, a more flexible order of service etc. Which do you prefer? Traditional or Contemporary or both?**
- 5. What style of worship describes your background?**
- 6. Are you open to learn new ways of worship? or is what you do now (whatever that may be) as far as you are willing to go? In other words are you willing to come out of your comfort?**

APPENDIX 10

Focus Group, November – December 2006

Focus Group November/December 2006

Name: Minister DiAna Kelley

Church Affiliation: Way of the Cross Holy Church Boston, Massachusetts

Interview Questions:

1. What are the current streams of worship at your church?
2. Is each form of worship successful on its own?
3. How does each form of worship contribute to the overall service?
Does it work well?
4. Can contemporary and traditional styles of worship blend successfully?
5. Is the relationship with God maintained with integrity with these various streams of worship?
6. How do you think God views contemporary worship?
7. Does worship work at your church?
8. How does the blended form of worship bring justice and liberation to our lives?

Way of the Cross Holy Church is a Pentecostal church located in Boston, Massachusetts. On any given Sunday you will see various types of worship practices in service. The service begins with Praise and Worship by a small team of people "called" to that particular ministry. There is also a devotional time where church members can proclaim the graces of God by telling how their week went or how God has blessed them or "carried them through." Way of the Cross has one main choir and various soloists who bless and lead the congregation further into worship. This church also has a prophetic mime ministry. Way of the Cross does not have a dance ministry but often has invited guests to minister through dance for their services.

Min. Kelly views the praise and worship, devotional time and the choir to be very traditional in style. She refers to the praise and worship to be "down home" and the choir which she refers to as "old school" sings mostly hymns. The devotional time is very traditional reminiscent of the days when saw dust was still on the floors of most churches. However, the worship through dance and the prophetic mime ministry, she considers to be more charismatic and contemporary.

Min. Kelly believes that the praise and worship section is successful because it helps people connect with the Spirit of God while the choir unifies and prepares everyone to be in unity with the Mind of Christ. She believes that the devotional period is outdated and often used as a sounding board for people to talk incessantly without regard to others or the Spirit of God.

In her church, Min. Kelly does not think that the service flows very well. Each type of worship tends to stand on its own and does not flow with the Spirit of God. She believes that worship should be a constant ebb and flow of events that unify the service in

accordance to the Spirit of God. She believes that people are too "tied to what happens next" instead of letting the Spirit move the service to where the Spirit wants to go. Min. Kelly believes that her church is in need of persons who are spiritually gifted in leading worship in order for the service to flow as she believes it should.

Overall, Min. Kelly believes that God is pleased with both the traditional and contemporary styles of worship as long as the "heart of the people" are with God. The integrity and relationship between members and God is maintained because of their personal relationship with God first. It is what they bring into corporate worship that makes it successful or not.

Min. Kelly asserts that it is important to keep tradition. It reminds us of where our ancestors have come but it is also important to let the younger generation be led by what God is giving them. She believes that God gives to each generation a new creativity to be expressed in a much different way than the previous generation. This freedom of worship creates liberty when those worshipping can express the realities and complexities of their lives to an Almighty God. This honest expression in both youth and adults gives us a way to live out justice and freedom in our world.

In conclusion, I agreed with much of what Min. Kelly had to say about worship in general. I believe there is a place for both contemporary and traditional styles of worship within one worship service. The admittance of one style should not mean the absence of the other especially when there are men, women and children of different backgrounds, ages, socioeconomic backgrounds and in some places different cultures. I believe God honors our expression of creativity in worship and allows whatever instruments we have available to be used for worshipping God. "...Praise Him with the

sound of the trumpeter; praise Him with the lute and harp! Praise Him with the timbrel and dance; praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes! Praise Him with loud cymbals; praise Him with clashing cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!” (NKJV) In our creativity God is expressed in new and unique ways. This brings healing, deliverance, freedom and a sense of justice for us all.

Rev. Douglas Edmond
Rev. Graves

Class of 4th Year
Seminar

Focus Group November/December 2006

Name Deacon Paul Porter

Church Affiliation: Member of Deacon Board, Shiloh Baptist Church

Questions for Consideration – Reflecting upon our discussion about Worship, and given the current streams of worship that take place in modern day churches today, are the current streams of worship successful? **Can contemporary and traditional worship blend successfully and still maintain the integrity of our relationship with God? How does this concept work at your church? -- Or does it?**

AND, How does this "blended form" of worship bring justice and liberation to our lives?

I'm not sure I have a definitive answer for you, but I'm going to tackle this because I realize that it's been on my mind, also. And, there are some things that we have talked about that I had trouble adjusting to. I believe there is a certain amount of success, because at Shiloh, in New Rochelle, we have seen a return of young people. And, they are taking a more active role in the church. There was friction, at first, from many. Even our previous pastor had some reservations about the validity of, let's say Hip-Hop beats and Rapping, by the young folks. But, if the result is more people in worship, and opportunity to reach our youth, an opportunity to take the young people back from the gangs and violence, then I believe it can't be all bad. There is also a new surge of men, who seem to be following the young women into the church. At least that is our experience. There is, though, a lot of ambivalence on the part of the old-line members. We often hear them talking among themselves about some of the things that are becoming the new norm of service i.e. the Praise Dance Ministry, and the Mime Ministry. Some even have voiced objections about the 6-piece band that plays for the choirs. And I know that some of the arrangements of the old songs confuses and disturbs many of our seniors. In all things, change is difficult. This is no different. Just because it's happening in the church, it's still change.

I must admit that even I am not altogether certain that I am happy with the disappearance of the singing of Hymns. The Youth Choir is just as likely to break out with a rap rendition as it is to sing a gospel song. Some of the old songs have been so tweaked that the tunes are barely recognizable.

We are, however, becoming more and more comfortable as time passes. We were blessed to have gotten a new pastor, 2 years ago, who is a contemporary thinker. He has helped, through his teachings from the Bible, with the acceptance of many, in the congregation, with these changes and with as little opposition as possible.

Rev. Hintz has authored a new idea in which he encouraged some of the not-so-old seniors to join in with the dance and the mime ministries. They were apprehensive, at first, but now they seem to be having a lot of fun with the experiment. And, there was an immediate bonding with the two age groups. Many of the young people in our church are residents of the group homes in the area. They come to us with little or no experiences with loving, or being loved. And also, many of our senior citizens no longer have access to their own children and grand children. There was a need in both groups that this experiment fulfills.

The Baptist church, in general, has had to make some adjustments to these new methods. That's why, I believe we now have new sects within the church. That's why we now have a sect called Progressive Baptists that has been around for about 50 years. There is always a growth that comes out of dissension. And the church's growth is no exception.

As to how this blended form of worship brings justice and liberation to our lives, I don't think we have a choice in this matter. If the Baptist church and any Afro-Centric worship group is going to survive, it will need to keep the young people involved in our churches. And we cannot survive without our older members either. The new task of any pastor or

board of deacons is to find a happy medium so this mix can take place. This will mean keeping an open mind about the concerns of both groups. We must provide an open forum where any and all complaints are heard, and addressed to the satisfaction of the disgruntled, the curious, and, even the disinterested. The times, they are a changin' is a truism that we cannot escape. There is a new and dynamic group of young people who want to be heard, and want to have the same freedom of expression that we craved in our early beginnings. Doesn't that sound like the same issues that drove us out of the white churches. Weren't we looking for these same rights? And if we follow this premise, of needing to honor the desires of all who wish to have a place to come for worship, how then can we not allow these changes to happen? Who are we to deny this growth? I see this as growth, to have fertile ground to nurture and grow. Christ came to serve the disenfranchised. Even before Richard Allen and his companions walked out of Saint George, there was dissension involved with religion. The Bible tells us that the early church had difficulty with the established church when they began to preach new covenant ideas. I think this is a struggle that will go on for as long as people who wish to worship their God seek religious freedoms.

As we look back across the vista of time, we see that there has always been a need for adjusting to the wants that religious freedom mandates. I firmly believe that as we come to understand God better, we will need new ways to address our worship of Him.

I'm really glad we talked about this topic. It is something that needed to be addressed. I'm surprised that we haven't done more dialoguing about this topic in a larger forum. This would be a great topic for an interdenominational forum. I think I'm going to speak to my Pastor about whether he believes this has merit as a topic for a number of church leaders and members to come together and address. I'm truly glad you chose me for your survey.

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